



An International Center  
for Soil Fertility and  
Agricultural Development

# Success Story

## Farmers in Afghanistan Sow Seeds of Hope in Their War-Torn Country

Afghan farmer, Abdul Khaliq, has already benefited from the IFDC project in his country. When farmer Khaliq received fertilizer to use on his wheat crop, he said, “I hope this program continues so that Afghanistan can become agriculturally strong and independent.”

Ensuring adequate supplies of good quality fertilizers for Afghan farmers to use to increase their wheat yields is the foremost objective of IFDC’s project, being funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The bread on the Afghan farmers’ tables is evidence that we are making a difference for Afghanistan. With IFDC assistance, the Afghan farmers harvested 80% more wheat in 2002 than in 2001.



To avoid disrupting the market, IFDC chose to allow local dealers to distribute the fertilizers. More than 90,000 Afghan farmers received fertilizer vouchers from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The farmers then exchanged the vouchers for fertilizer at the local dealer shops that were reimbursed by IFDC. The urea fertilizer was imported mainly from Pakistan, as well as Iran and Uzbekistan.

“We are now working in 12 provinces in Afghanistan—Baghlan, Bامyān, Ghazni, Hilmand, Kabul, Kapisa, Kunduz, Laghman, Nangahar, Parwan, Takhar, and Wardak,” says Dr. Amit H. Roy, IFDC President and Chief Executive Officer.

Farmers who receive fertilizer pay for it within a month after harvest to the local shura or town committee, who use the funds for local development projects. Technical leaflets explaining in local languages how to properly use the fertilizer were prepared and distributed along with the fertilizer.

Afghan farmers were very pleased to receive the fertilizer to help them increase their wheat yields. IFDC staff visited the farmers’ fields to observe the use of this material on the wheat that had been sown. Afghanistan’s Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, the NGOs, and IFDC closely coordinated the entire process.

Agriculture is Afghanistan’s mainstay. Roy says that if Afghanistan can improve the national security environment, positive economic results will be visible in six to eighteen months. Economic activities have improved since the conflict. “You can feel it in the air,” says Roy. In the times before Soviet occupation, Afghanistan was fully self-sufficient and produced enough food for all of its citizens. The country was known for its fruits, which it exported to neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Uzbekistan. At the moment, however, Afghan farmers have to grow wheat to feed their families. However, IFDC’s program strengthens the agricultural market and makes future growth possible. “It will be a slow process but it can be done,” says Roy. The current average yield for wheat worldwide is three tons of wheat per hectare planted. In Afghanistan, the average yield is far less at one ton per hectare. This difference is attributed to the improper and inadequate use of fertilizer, crop protection products, and improved seeds – the building blocks of high-yielding agriculture.

IFDC evaluated Afghanistan’s situation and concluded that the country has to overcome three main challenges. According to Roy, the first problem is the lack of credit extended to farmers. “The farmers don’t have money and they need support during the growing season.” The enormous distances between farmers, suppliers, and markets create the second problem. “It is very difficult to move supplies,” says Roy. For one acre of land, for example, two or three 50-kg bags of fertilizer are needed. “Fertilizers are very bulky and must be transported on trucks. The roads, however, are in bad condition, especially in areas primarily used for farming.” The third challenge is to overcome the current lack of knowledge regarding modern agricultural practices. “For example,” explains Roy, “the farmers do not know how to apply the fertilizer.” IFDC’s plan is to not only provide hands-on training to some farmers but to get the local dealers involved in training and informing their customers.

Agriculture is Afghanistan’s only path to economic advancement. With appropriate agricultural supplies and knowledge of modern farming methods, Afghan farmers can help their country to resurrect its agricultural sector out of the ashes and rubble of their war-torn country.