



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Iraqi Farmers Invest in Nation's future with PRT Help-

By Diane Crow
Special Correspondent

April 18, 2008

Mosul - In the middle of a military push against Al Qaeda in Iraq, farmers in Ninewa Province are working across sectarian and ethnic lines to form diverse farmer associations spurring community cooperation as well as bringing hope for economic revitalization.

The Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) has been a part of that effort working to unit hundreds of northern Iraqi farmers, regardless of ethnicity, tribe or religious background, to address agricultural challenges.

Since spring 2007 the PRT has worked with hundreds of farmers, representing the Shia Shabak, Yezidi, Kurdish, Sunni Arab and various Christian communities, to overcome historical rivalries and pursue common goals through farmers associations supported by the PRT.

“We have found some true leaders of various communities willing to cross community, ethnic and sectarian bounds and work together, said Michael Hankey, economic adviser on the Ninewa PRT. “There is a commitment and eagerness of each organization to find ways to work together to find community wide solutions”

Highly subsidized since the mid-1960s and facing a severe drought, farmers in Ninewa are seeking new ideas to help them to survive in the post-war economy. Once part of Iraq's agricultural breadbasket but in an area historically known for ethnic and sectarian tensions, local businessmen, farmers, and tribal leaders are now working with the PRT to focus on the role of agriculture as an economic engine.

To that end the PRT donated nine 80-horsepower, four-wheel drive, Iraqi-built tractors at a price of \$225,000 that were delivered March 14 to three farming associations with the hopes that more local investors would be encouraged to pump their own money into agriculture.

“The amount of assistance we can give is a good thing,” Hankey said, “but the true economic potential is going to be released when we can find more and more of these Iraqi investors willing to put up their own money, energize their own local economies and look for local investment opportunities that put their own resources into play.”



An Iraqi farmer plows his land in rural Ninewa Province using a new Iraqi-built tractor donated by the Ninewa PRT. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. John Crosby, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Local Iraqi businessman George Kako more than matched the PRT's investment. Kako is one of seven board members on one of the associations called the Brotherhood Union for Agricultural Development and Environmental Protection, which represents approximately 100 families amounting to 600 to 700 people.

"People have made empty promises to us in the past, but thanks to the PRT, this time we have received the tractors and we are moving forward," Kako said. "These tractors will plow the land much deeper, allowing the soil to retain moisture much longer, allowing the seeds to grow much stronger yielding better crops."

Other local investors have also matched the PRT investment. A board member of one association dedicated his own funds to buy plows, trailers and associated equipment for use with the tractors, more than matching the PRT's investment in that local community. At another association, board members said their members would also commit their own funds to buy pesticide sprayers.

As a part of the organization, members share their newfound wealth. "When we finish with the tractors, we will take them to other farms in the community and allow them to use them so that our whole community is more productive," said a member of the organization.

He added, "The organization will help bring in new and fresh ideas and allow agriculture here to grow. Modern techniques will help increase productivity. We will work together as a group. We will decide together what we will plant and when and we will do it in an organized manner to improve our output of crops every year."

Kako said, "We are hopeful that this country will experience the agriculture revolution that many European countries have experienced. As Iraqis, multi ethnicity is a part of who we are. It's the terrorists who imported all of these ideas of hatred from abroad. We ourselves are one country irrespective of our creed or our origin. I am very comfortable being a part of this association; it's a harbinger of good things to come."