



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Seeds of Revitalization Planted at Iraqi Agricultural Fair-

By Michael Torreano
Special Correspondent

May 16, 2008

Al Wahdah, Baghdad Province - The first-ever agricultural fair was recently held in this farming district outside the capital with the help of U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and their Coalition Forces partners.

On April 26th and 27th, over 1,500 Iraqi farmers attended the First Annual Al Mada'in Agriculture Technology Exposition held in Al Wahdah, a town approximately 40 miles southeast of Baghdad.

The farmers came from all areas of the Qada (district) to learn about modern agricultural technologies and practices that improve farm productivity, conserve water resources, enhance soil health, prevent animal diseases and create additional streams of agricultural revenue.

The event was realized through the combined efforts of the Al Mada'in Agriculture Committee, the locally embedded PRT (EPRT), the 3rd Brigade Combat Team (BCT) of the 3rd Infantry Division, and the 13th Infantry Battalion from the Republic of Georgia.

It was fruitful in many ways – acquainting the farmers with new agriculture technologies, collecting information to start product specific associations and helping to restore faith in local government.

With an estimated 58 percent of residents being farmers or employed in agriculture related businesses, the dissemination of new technologies and best farming practices will have a big impact on the economy of Al Mada'in.

The expo was a resounding success according to local agriculture leaders and attendees. The EPRT's agriculture partner, Mr. Ala'a Kathem (Agriculture Research Station Manager and expo beekeeping presenter) was ecstatic over the turnout and overall enthusiasm.

Kathem is committed to building on the success of the expo, telling the EPRT, "I never expected so many people. We will do this expo every year and every year we will make it better."

Each day at the Expo started with general session speakers, including the Al Mada'in Qa'im Makom, Mr. Muhsin Nassir Ishnaya Al Rubaiee who encouraged the attendees to take advantage of the information provided at the expo.



Some of the 1,500 Iraqi farmers at the First Annual Al Mada'in Agriculture Exposition in Al Wahdah sponsored by the Al Mada'in Agriculture Committee, the locally embedded PRT, the 3rd Brigade Combat Team (BCT), and troops from the Republic of Georgia.

Following the general session speakers, the farmers attended presentations on a wide range of agricultural topics including beekeeping, greenhouses horticulture for vegetable production using drip irrigation, poultry, date palms, fish farming, animal health and agriculture cooperatives.

As water is a scarce and vital resource in Al Mada'in, the greenhouse demonstration on raising vegetables using drip irrigation was perhaps the expositions most popular exhibit. The technology uses very little water and allows farmers to raise vegetables year round.

The Baghdad PRT also contributed to the event's success with presentations on poultry farming by agricultural advisers Paul Heidloff and James Bright.

Each farmer completed a registration form that provided information on their current farming operation and agriculture interests. Mr. Floyd Wood, Baghdad EPRT Agriculture Advisor from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, plans to use this registration information to facilitate the formation of commodity-specific agricultural associations.

Mr. Wood explained that "Fish farmers have production, technology and marketing challenges that are unique to that commodity. Organizing agricultural associations according to the type of commodity they produce (i.e. fish, dates, poultry, livestock, etc.) will enable its members to focus on solving issues that are unique to their farming enterprise."

The Al Mada'in Agriculture Technology Exposition was funded through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Iraq Rapid Assistance Project (IRAP).

PRTs are a civilian-military initiative led by the Department of State. The teams work with coalition partners and provincial and local governments in all of the country's 18 provinces to promote stabilization through governance and economic programs.

(Michael Torreano is the USAID representative on the EPRT in Al Mada'in Qada)