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Ninewa PRT Greenhouse Program offers Iraqi farmers a glimmer of hope for their future
With contributions from 2LT Evelyn Lee, 130th Engineer Brigade, Multi-National Division-North

Ninewa Province, Iraq— In Qaraqosh, Iraq, another local association is a step closer to helping improve Iraq's agricultural sector. The association is one of many benefitting from the Greenhouse Demonstration Program, a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) based grassroots capacity building program which allows winners of a lottery to receive a greenhouse purchased by the PRT. Along with a greenhouse, winners also receive training on the greenhouse farming industry provided by Iraq's Ministry of Agriculture. Recipients in turn repay a portion of their profits received from crops grown in the greenhouses to other agriculture associations to allow for the purchase of additional greenhouses.

There are significant challenges to the program, according to PRT Economic Section Agriculture Specialist, Fred Woehl. A two-year drought, war, and neglect have devastated Iraq's once fertile land. Also, under the former Ba'athist regime, production quotas were mandated; leaving today's Iraqi farmers struggling to figure out a workable business model vis-a-vis greenhouse use.

The chairman of a local agricultural society, which received three greenhouses, stated that he believed that the new greenhouses should help overcome the environmental difficulties. The simple design of metal and plastic uses heat from the sun to create a controlled environment to extend the growing season. He also expressed hope that the Greenhouse Demonstration Program would spread to the rest of Ninewa Province and eventually all of Iraq.

Although he expressed hope that the PRT-Iraq relationship would eventually change the country, there were others who felt differently.

The Vice Chairman of the association noted, "There was a lack of understanding when the US invaded Iraq. We asked [the US] to please learn about our culture. Now the climate is different. People are beginning to realize that the US had made a mistake, but [are here] to help us build up our nation."

Another Vice Chairman added, "Complete trust in the US will still come with time. Some people still hold onto their stubborn ideas of the US ... and the terrorists now are exploiting [this] for their own agendas."

The Vice Chairman added, shaking his head, that Iraq has, "stepped back hundreds of years and now needs organizations [like the PRT] to go forward. He concluded, "We cannot live in fear."

PRTs, inaugurated by the former Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, serve as an important tool in helping Iraq achieve economic and political stabilization. The Agricultural Association, established with help from the PRT, is the first gender, religion, and culturally diverse agricultural organization in Iraq.

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