



FAO Representation - Afghanistan

Afghanistan's Agricultural Prospects for the year ahead – 09 June 2008

Background

Until recently, more than 85% of Afghanistan's population lived in rural areas. The current figure is 80%, indicating an increase in the urban population. About 8% of the rural population – or 6.5% of the total population - are nomads.

The economy of Afghanistan has been traditionally dominated by agriculture which now accounts for 53% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs around 66% of the workforce.

Over the centuries, Afghan farmers have domesticated at least 18 important crops, including wheat, peas, carrots, melons, apples, and pistachios. Wheat makes up 80% of Afghanistan's cereal production; with about 35% of wheat production comes from rainfed areas.

In a good agricultural year – like 2007, for example - Afghanistan is nearer to self-sufficiency in cereals. About 60-80% of the cereal deficit in the country is covered through commercial imports. The rest is either food aid or uncovered deficit.

Historically, livestock provided 40% of Afghanistan's export earnings. However, over the past 25 years, Afghanistan has lost at least 40% of its livestock population of some 23 million animals.

Rapid deforestation has left forests on only 2% of the land and the remaining forests are under threat.

Achievements

8 private seed enterprises set up.

50,000 mt of high quality certified wheat seed produced in the last five years.

Afghanistan is able to diagnose Avian Influenza in the lab within 6 hours.

Dairy Unions produce 10,000 liters of fresh and hygienic dairy products per day. The union member's annual income has increased from \$58 in 2000 to \$527 in 2007.

500,000 ha of irrigated land has been rehabilitated.

28,000 rural women received training, equipment and pullets in 10 provinces of Afghanistan. This has increased beneficiary income from \$156 to \$228 annually.

Rinder Pest animal disease has been eliminated from Afghanistan through Transboundary Animal Disease activities.

Built up the capacity of Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) to establish an agricultural statistics and market information system.

Since 2002, through emergency operations, 12,500 mt of improved wheat seed and 20,000 tonnes of chemical fertilizers have been distributed to natural disaster affected farmers in all over Afghanistan.

Weather and Irrigation

Cumulative rainfall from October 2007 to March 2008 in most parts of the country was well below normal. The rainfall for the current crop season started in Badakshan and Kabul in October 2007. All other parts of the country received very little rain in October. This weather pattern for October is not abnormal.

Normal agricultural operations suffered a major setback when November was dry all over. Weather conditions in December 2007 and January 2008 improved, but reduced and erratic precipitation in February and March was experienced in all parts of the country.

The dry weather condition adversely affected irrigated wheat and livestock as well. Extreme cold in January and February caused serious damage to fruits and vegetable crops in the main growing areas. Central areas of the country and the western highland received slightly less snow than usual. The south experienced wet winter and benefited. Reports from the field suggest that weather condition in April and May improved. However, this is not going to revive both types of wheat as its water stress level had already reached a critical stage in March/April.

Crop Conditions

Given the long period involved in harvesting of crop it is rather early to forecast the full implications of this year's anomalous weather pattern on crop production. However, it is very clear that production of wheat will be one of the lowest in the latest years.

Rainfed wheat is not in good condition in most parts of the country as it experienced serious water stress, especially in January to March. The north, the north-east and the west regions account for over three-fourth of rainfed wheat produced in the country. Rainfed wheat has failed in the western parts of the country also. Main adverse effect of rainfed failure will be a considerable reduction in wheat production in the north and north-east, which are breadbasket of the country.

Cereal Production shortfall

Production of cereal and other agricultural products in 2008 will decrease sharply. In a normal year, wheat's share in overall cereal production and requirement is 80% each.

Fodder and feed

The low wheat production this year will aggravate the shortage of fodder and feed supply.

Animal Production and Health

Overall production of livestock products in 2008 is tentatively estimated to be about 10% lower than in 2007. The reasons for this are mentioned below:

- Shortage of rainfall impacted negatively on the development and growth of pasture crops. In addition, planted fodder like oats, Berseem and Lucerne in the demonstration fields and the seed multiplication plots were heavily damaged due to the excessively winter.
- Due to deaths of considerable number of animals in the winter, the animal population will not grow as expected.

- The price of feed on the market has gone up by over 100% in a year. Many farmers cannot afford to purchase feed for their animals. Some herders or farmers may opt for distress selling of their livestock, thereby depleting their stock.

Agricultural commodity prices

Steep rise reported in price of local wheat in April 2008 in all regions of the country. Average price of wheat in April 2008 was Afs 29.8/kg, i.e. 25% higher than its price in March 2008. The price soared 130% more compared with its average price in April 2007. Annual rise for “Bread and Cereals” reported by CSO (128 percent) is consistent with the annual rise in the price of wheat reported by FAAHM (130%).

Given the latest months’ price trend and unfavorable production prospects of wheat this year, the price of wheat is likely to increase further.

For more information:

Please visit:

<http://www.fao.org/world/Afghanistan/>

<http://www.agriculture.gov.af>