

Arkansas Guardsmen apply farming experience to Afghani development

Agriculture Development Team stands up operations in Zabul Province.

Story and photo by Lt. Col. Keith Moore

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Coalition forces in Zabul Province of Afghanistan gained a new peacekeeping force in the agricultural redevelopment process in April as the Zabul Agriculture Development Team stood up operations.

The ADT, made up of approximately 60 members of the Arkansas National Guard, arrived in the provincial capital earlier this month and have been establishing relationships with governmental leaders, agencies, organizations and military representatives who all have a stake in redevelopment throughout Zabul province.

“Our team is excited about assisting with agriculture education, training programs and projects throughout the province, but these relationships are vital in determining how we can best integrate our experience and expertise with programs and operations that are ongoing,” said Col. Stephen Redman, commander of the ADT.

The ADT Team members bring formal education and practical farming experience in such areas as soil science, irrigation and water management, large and small animal health, poultry production, crop and farm management, marketing, storage and public health.

The ADT’s mission includes implementing agricultural education and training programs at farm level that will support the Zabul Director of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock’s five-year development plan for the province.

The principle objectives contained in the plan focus around training and education for Afghans to serve as district level agriculture extension agents; training in water management and irrigation along with crop and livestock development programs.

The agriculture specialists have begun work at two demonstration farms in the province where they will focus their education and training programs through a hands-on approach with local farmers.

“We arrived somewhat late in the growing season to benefit many farmers this year,” said Lt. Col. David Sheely, team leader for the agriculture specialists.



Sgt. Eric Holcomb, 1st Lt. Addison Taylor and their interpreter interact with young shepherds tending animals in the Qalat City Bazaar.

“However, we feel that the education and demonstration of different agricultural practices such as crop rotation and drip irrigation can not only help the farmers in the off-season but better prepare them for future seasons.”

The team’s demonstration farm plots are located in Sha-Joy and Shahr-e-Safa. In conjunction with the farms, the team plans to develop information centers in area bazaars where local farmers can learn about the training available at the ADT’s farm plots.

Redman says that success for his ADT Team will be measured by the number of Afghan farmers that education and training can impact.

In addition to their work at the demonstration farms, the ADT members visit the bazaars and markets to discuss fruit and produce directly with the growers.

“Farmers are farmers all over the world. One thing we know is that we like to talk about the stuff we grow, or the trouble we had trying to grow it,” said Sheely.

Redman says the ADT’s long-term objective is to develop a sustainable agricultural education program utilizing Afghan farm extension agents in order to improve the production capability and overall quality of life for Zabul’s farmers and herdsman.

