

Restoring Date Palms and Open Markets

American aid is dredging canals in the ancient Fertile Crescent and improving its farms and orchards.

Ancient Mesopotamia was the place where man first learned the art of cultivating wheat and other foods. But the fertile lands between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, where for 8,000 years crops and livestock were raised, fell on hard times under Ba'ath Party neglect, and Iraq's farming system deteriorated, producing some of the lowest crop yields in the world.

Working with Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI), the United States is addressing the underlying causes of declining production. Focusing on improving production of grains, vegetables, fruits, livestock, dairy, and poultry, the program also emphasizes rural financial service, water management and soil reclamation. Beyond a series of quick-impact projects, the U.S. goal is a productive, employment-generating, market-oriented agricultural system over the next three to five years. Agriculture is the second largest employer in Iraq.

If the farms and pastures and date orchards of Iraq can be made to prosper once more, it will keep thousands of young people from migrating to the cities in search of jobs. It is often in the slums of such cities that youths are recruited into crime or radical ideologies out of frustration at their inability to find rewarding employment and training.



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American agricultural assistance is bringing new technology to Iraq's neglected

agricultural sector, including here at Ninawa.



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One program is supplying offshoots like these to 13 Iraqi governorates.

Date Palm Rehabilitation

Iraq once had the largest date palm tree orchards in the world, with over 30 million trees. But the Iraq-Iran War and the catastrophic destruction of the southern marshes cut that number in half, leaving many Iraqis without homes or income. Now, the Ministry of Agriculture has made date palm rehabilitation a priority.

Under an agreement signed February 7, 2004, USAID's Agricultural Reconstruction Development Program for Iraq will purchase 40,000 date palms for orchards and offshoot nurseries in 13 governorates, while the Ministry will provide land, personnel, logistics, and maintenance for the orchards. The agreement is particularly significant because there are 621 varieties of date palms in Iraq, but no existing orchards where certified date palm varieties can be purchased. Initially, therefore, the mother orchards will serve as a national register of varieties, and, future offshoots will be available for planting.



Iraq once had more date palm orchards than any other country. Under an agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture, the U.S. is helping restore the industry.

Results

- **Winter Crop Technology Demonstrations:** On 334 hectares in 15 governorates, 128 farm families are establishing plots with new crop varieties.
- **Kirkuk Veterinary Hospital Renovation:** A grant of \$96,000 is renovating this veterinary hospital.
- **Taza and Rashad Veterinary Clinic Rehabilitation:** A \$50,000 USAID grant will be matched by supplies and equipment from the Ministry of Agriculture. These rural veterinary clinics are the two principal sources of vaccines and medicines for animals in 125 communities.
- **Internet Connectivity and Repairs to a Student Union Building:** The Baghdad University School of Agriculture will receive a \$75,000 grant.
- **Seven grants totaling \$394,000** were approved in February 2004 to help rebuild veterinary programs in North and Central Iraq.
- **The Ministry of Agriculture is establishing 18 date palm nurseries** in an effort to re-establish Iraq's dominant position in the international date market.