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**TAJIKISTAN**

## SNAPSHOT

# Turning Water into Cash

**USAID and Mercy Corps' program works with communities to build critical infrastructure to ensure stable livelihoods**



Photo: Mercy Corps/Clay Westrope

*Sabur, above, diligently turns the wheel of the new irrigation system to water his crops.*

***“The most important thing is that this will make all of our lives better and more stable.”***

“For the last three years, my yields have been 30 percent of what they were before,” says Sabur Kumischev, as he makes a sweeping motion with his hand indicating the land where his crops are grown. “All I could grow was corn. The other farmers could only grow corn. We had nothing to sell to each other and had to buy all of our food.”

Sabur’s village is about two hours outside the northern city of Khujand. For years, the community has relied on the limited water supplied by the local collective farm. When the collective farm declared bankruptcy a few years ago, the water stopped and farmers were left without an irrigation source. This, coupled with the high salinity of the soil due to high groundwater in the area, has led to very low yields and a limited variety of crops for sale or consumption.

With the help of the USAID and Mercy Corps’ Tajikistan Stability Enhancement Program, Sabur’s village elected to build its own irrigation system to replace the defunct collective farm’s one. The system can irrigate up to 20 hectares of land and is currently working at half capacity, leaving room for expansion. Furthermore, the system will help resolve the high soil salinity issue by lowering the groundwater level.

“I can now grow vegetables like carrots, cucumbers and tomatoes,” says Sabur with a smile. “Before, most of the income of our community came from family members working in Russia. Now, we will be able to sell our crops at the market.”

Sabur estimates that he will be able to make up to \$1,100 next year, a hefty sum from only 0.15 hectares of land. He hopes to rebuild his home and repair crumbling village infrastructure with his money.

“The most important thing is that this will make all of our lives better and more stable. I can now afford for my seventh son to get married. We were even able to grow melons for the first time this year. Next year, I expect the yield to be even greater,” exclaims Sabur, wiping watermelon juice from his chin with a hearty laugh.