

Tajik Farmers Increase Yields and Profits

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Village women pack persimmons for export to Russia.

“Now the village women are able to earn a living for themselves”

-Litfiya Kholova

Farmers participating in the USAID-funded Water User Association (WUA) Support Project in Tajikistan increased their profitability by an estimated \$1 million on 6,310 hectares of farm land under irrigation, according to a 2006 assessment survey comparing data from 2005 and 2006 harvests. Members of 15 WUAs contributed labor and materials to match project investments in irrigation system rehabilitation and water management training.

Profitability increases were achieved in cotton, wheat, orchard crops, and vegetables. Cotton production benefited the most from improved irrigation and water management, increasing from 1.8 to 2.8 tons per hectare. Wheat and orchard harvests nearly tripled, and vegetable and strawberry yields doubled. Although cotton led in profitability, high value fruit and vegetable production offers the greatest potential for economic growth. Participating farmers controlled water to

their row crops and allocated water to orchards and gardens to grow strawberries, grapes, persimmons, and onions.

Unreliable and poorly managed irrigation and community water systems are widespread in Tajikistan. Limited resources for infrastructure maintenance, lack of technical and management skills, and farmer debt all contribute to the declining condition of the irrigation and drainage systems. A shrinking labor pool also plays a role as more people migrate to urban areas in search of jobs.

The WUA project provides training directly to those who are affected most by degraded water systems. Participants learn how to make investment decisions to maintain and improve on-farm systems and resolve conflicts and long standing water problems.

Another key to farmer success was new connections to markets. WUA members near Dushanbe exported some 200 metric tons of persimmons and 1,000 tons of grapes to Russia. Farmers recognized the importance of increasing production and seeking new market opportunities.

Gauyr Abdulloev, a member of the Mehtari WUA, states, “We had a good harvest this year. In 2005, I had a profit from persimmons of about \$3,000; this year it was about \$5,500. This kind of increase was attained by nearly all families. Since we got a big crop of persimmons in Ohchakman, Samarkandi, and Mehtari, we decided to sell our products to Russia, and we sold 200 tons.”

With profitability of the last harvest, farmers have realized the vast potential for economic gain. Post-harvest processing and marketing needs to be addressed more comprehensively to take full ad-

vantage of what the WUAs can accomplish. Many farmers have requested support in identifying future markets, improving processing technology, and increasing knowledge of plant species and farming methods.

The project team developed and implemented a gender strategy in 2004-2005, and as a result, women are more actively participating in association activities in Tajikistan. With improved access to water, women are now able to cultivate many high value fruits and vegetables. Women have assumed a lead role in establishing the key market linkages for several of these crops.

Litfiya Kholova, a member of the Ohchakman WUA, highlighted the enhanced role of women. "In order to help Water User Associations and the communities' women, the chairman of our association made an agreement with a Dushanbe market and today some 50 women have an opportunity to sell their products.... Now the village women are able to earn a living for themselves and their life conditions have improved," she explained.

Looking ahead, farmers want to continue to increase their investment in irrigation water



Farmers cultivate strawberries in the Rudaki district of Tajikistan.

management. With last year's successful harvest, farmers are beginning to see how participation in a WUA can lead to better managed water systems and improved livelihoods.



Litfiya Kholova speaks to village women about the benefits of increased participation in Water User Association activities.



As a result of improved access to water, high value crops such as strawberries were plentiful in this year's harvest.

Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.