



WISHH Program and Partners to Assist USDA's Ag Reconstruction Work in Afghanistan

March 2, 2010... Saint Louis, Missouri... The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today that the American Soybean Association's (ASA) World Initiative for Soy in Human Health (WISHH) program and three partnering organizations will receive a cooperative agreement for work in Afghanistan. The USDA Food for Progress program brings the strengths of soy protein to fight some of the highest rates of malnutrition in the world, as well as help rebuild Afghanistan's food industry. The estimated value of the project is \$26 million.

"We are excited to help Afghan farmers rebuild their infrastructure while we make healthy food available to their fellow citizens and to build a market for soy," said WISHH Chairman and ASA Board member Scott Fritz, a soybean producer from Winamac, Ind. "Diets will improve and soy consumption will increase as Afghan agriculture and the local economy develops. When this happens, everybody wins."



Afghan children's faces went from sick to normal in a month after NEI added soy foods to their diets. Photo credit: NEI

The three-year project will allow WISHH to launch its first extended effort in Afghanistan. Joining WISHH on the project are: Shelter for Life International, which is headquartered in Minnesota; California-based Nutrition and Education International Inc. (NEI), and CBI Global located in Ohio. These organizations have seen the need and enormous potential for soy in their approximately 20 combined years of work in the war-torn country.

USDA's efforts to help redevelop Afghanistan's agriculture sector is the top Obama Administration priority for reconstruction. The USDA cooperative agreement will provide 240 metric tons of defatted soy flour over the next three years to meet immediate nutritional needs of 5,000 women and their families. The agreement also includes 13,750 metric tons of soybean oil that will be monetized or sold into the local market in support of the project activities. The project will also bolster the processing end of the agricultural value chain, with the shipment of 6,000 metric tons of soybeans over three years. Afghan soybean processing facilities will use the soybeans to produce soy flour and soybean oil for the local market. Over the life of the program and all of its activities, this project will support more than 220,000 direct beneficiaries.

Afghanistan has some of the worst health statistics in the world. According to UNICEF, more than half of all children under five suffer from moderate or severe stunting. Twenty five percent of children die before reaching their fifth birthday. The health of rural Afghan people, particularly women and children, is often the worst in the nation.

NEI founder and nutrition scientist Dr. Steven Kwon survived the post-war devastation in Korea in the 1950s before moving to the United States. Those experiences prompted him to go to Afghanistan in 2003 to see if he could help. Dr. Kwon identified that soy could play an important role in meeting the dire need for protein.



Soy milk and other soyfoods are effective in helping meet the protein and other nutritional needs of children and adults in Afghan refugee centers. Photo credit: NEI

With the support of local Afghan leaders, NEI has distributed soy flour to pregnant and lactating women and conducted nutrition education and soy cooking seminars. NEI has also worked with small bakeries to encourage them to use 10 percent soy flour in the production of naan (a traditional flatbread) for elementary schools and refugee camps.

Adding 10 percent soy flour increases the absorbable protein of the naan by 110 percent, says Dr. Kwon, who has witnessed the impact of soy in his 28 trips to Afghanistan. "After one month, the children's faces go from looking sick to normal," Kwon says "In three months, we see healthy and happy looking children—all because of soy."

Dr. Kwon is enthusiastic about the expansion of these results by working with WISHH under the new USDA Food for Progress cooperative agreement. "WISHH has the technical expertise to strengthen the (food) processing sector in the country...We can jumpstart this processing sector."

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Increased agricultural productivity will require rehabilitation of watersheds and improvements to irrigation infrastructure. Road repairs and small loan programs for farmers are key to the sustainability of the project. Shelter for Life has worked in these areas in Afghanistan since 1997. "The two decades of war crumbled the infrastructure," says Director of International Programs Mustafa Omar. "We are looking at parts of the country that have a history in food production, but are currently unable to do so."

CBI Global based in Columbus, Ohio, acting as agent for The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, will be monetization agent for the project. "Robert Clark at CBI was great throughout the entire proposal process and provided a lot of input," Fritz said. "CBI's monetization work is key to the entire effort."

The WISHH program is managed from ASA's world headquarters in Saint Louis. Since U.S. soybean farmers founded WISHH in 2000, WISHH has worked in 23 countries to improve diets, as well as encourage growth of food industries. Please visit www.wishh.org.

CBI Global is a leading international company active in development, management and growth of value-added businesses. Visit cbi-global.com.

NEI, based in Pasadena, Calif., is supported and run by volunteers who work full-time in various professional fields and donate their time and expertise to bring proper nutrition to impoverished communities in Afghanistan. Go to www.neifoundation.org.

Shelter for Life International is headquartered in Maple Grove, Minnesota. The humanitarian organization is currently serving in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and South Sudan. It has previously worked in Indonesia, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Burundi, and the United States. Go to www.shelter.org.

For more information contact:

Scott Fritz, WISHH Chairman, (574) 595-0392, sfritz@hughes.net

Bob Callanan, ASA Communications Director, (314) 576-1770, bcallanan@soy.org



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