

IV. MOST CRITICAL CONSTRAINTS TO PRODUCTION

In general, horticulture production is recovering slowly from the destruction of the war, the drought, and destruction of irrigation systems. However, where there once was double and triple cropping, much farmland has either been reduced to single cropping or left uncultivated. Large areas of orchards and natural valuable forests and grazing lands have dried out, and some native germ-plasm may have been destroyed by drought. The available cultivated land in Kabul, for example, has been reduced to two-thirds.

Applied Research Capacity

There is a general lack of new plant material for research facilities and farmers. Some research farms have 80 to 90% of their orchards, nurseries and hot beds destroyed. As a result, there are not enough seedlings to be distributed to the farmers. In 1976, the Ministry of Agriculture had research farms in a number of provinces. The eleven main research stations were located in Kabul, Kandahar, Kapisa, Kunduz, Bamyan and Herat.

Irrigation Availability and Distribution

Water availability was historically the single scarcest resource and greatest constraint to expanding Afghan agriculture (see Appendix A). Currently, the underground water level all over Afghanistan has fallen considerably. Surface water for irrigation has diminished to half its capacity in northern areas and to very low levels in the southern and western parts of the country. In some regions, especially southern areas, orchards and vineyards have been uprooted for fuel because drought killed trees and vines.

The Kabul River, for example, has sufficient water supply for the irrigation of not only adjacent lands, but also those located further away. The Nangrahar Canal, built by the former Soviet Union in the early seventies, carries water to the more distant farms. The efficiency of this canal has been reduced to 50% of its former capacity.

Inputs and Production Practices

Producers tend to use traditional technology with unimproved or old plant material. While some producers appear open to adoption of new technologies—from plant material to production practices—producers generally have little education or capital. Although fertilizer and pesticides are available, high prices and the lack of credit prevent their use by most farmers. Farm machinery and tools are generally non-existent or rudimentary. Apparently, production practices have always been poor in Afghanistan. Low quality seed, the lack of variety improvements insufficient pest control, low use of micronutrients and poor farm management was widespread (see Appendix A).

Enterprise management

Farm record keeping is very limited, both with regard to input costs, labor allocation, yield, and marketing price. Farmers, therefore, have no basis for making enterprise mix decisions to increase farm income. A general lack of market information (supply, demand, pricing) contributes to poor decision making at the producer level.

Field Extension Capacity, Institutions and Agencies

Agriculture services, particularly agriculture extension and credit facilities are non-existent or very poor. There are neither farmer cooperatives nor government credits available to

farmers. The lack of a functional extension service or other institutions to teach people how to grow and use vegetables limit the ability to introduce new products education and capacity. Additionally, it seems that the diagnostic skills of Afghans involved in extension type positions with the Ministry of Agriculture, NGOs or other organizations are very weak. Field agents have difficulty identifying plant problems as disease, pest, stress, etc. Consequently, plant problems receive no or improper treatment.