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PRESS RELEASE

USAID Distributes Corn and Peanut Seed to Helmand Farmers

5,000 farmers to produce 16,000 tons of corn, 1,000 tons of peanuts

Helmand Province, Afghanistan | June 12, 2008 — In support of Afghanistan's Master Plan for Agriculture, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is providing licit alternatives to growing poppy in Afghanistan's Helmand Province through a planting project that takes advantage of the high returns currently being seen globally for corn and peanut crops.

In coordination with local Shuras and elders representing farmers, USAID is distributing 288 metric tons of certified corn seed, four metric tons of peanut seed, and 1,400 metric tons of basic fertilizers to about 5,000 Helmand farmers. This initiative is part of the Afghanistan's Master Plan for Agriculture which calls for increasing the production of valuable crops in order to improve rural incomes.

Last year, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) reported that 19,000 hectares of corn was planted in Helmand producing roughly 40,000 tons. The USAID corn will seed 3,600 additional hectares resulting in up to 16,000 tons of corn. Roughly 200 hectares will produce 1,000 tons of peanut.

"Now is the time to work together to find alternatives to growing poppy," said Helmand farmer Haji Helmandual of this recent partnership between USAID and the people of Afghanistan. "We have given the commitment of our land and USAID has given the commitment to help poor farmers with distribution of seeds and fertilizer."

"Once the corn is harvested I will sell one third, use another third for my own consumption, and save the rest for planting next year," said Zareef, a Helmand farmer from Nadi-a-Ali. "In Helmand we are trying to get away from growing poppy and will happily switch to other crops if given a reasonable chance. Every poppy flower consumes the blood of the people."

Corn and peanut seed distribution is just one operational component of USAID's alternative development program, whose overall objective is to improve the licit income opportunities and well-being of thousands of southern rural families by integrating them into a growing regional economy. By providing licit income and employment opportunities, USAID will contribute to a gradual reduction of dependence on opium poppy in target areas throughout Helmand, Kandahar, and Uruzgan Provinces.

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