FAO calls for action across all sectors for addressing and achieving “Healthy Diet for a Zero Hunger World”.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in close coordination with Afghanistan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) celebrates the 39th Anniversary of the World Food Day (WFD) at MAIL in Afghanistan on 17 October 2019.

Every year on the World Food Day, FAO and its 130 member countries across the world commemorate the founding of FAO on 16 October 1945.

The theme for this year “Healthy Diet for a Zero Hunger World” calls on everyone to start thinking about what we eat and calls for action across sectors to make healthy and sustainable diets affordable and accessible to everyone.

For decades, the world was making progress in the fight against hunger, however the number of undernourished people is again on the rise and undergoing a “nutrition crisis”. More than 820 million people, or roughly one in nine people, are going hungry, and most of them are living in the Asia-Pacific region.

Food security in our times isn’t only a matter of quantity, it is also a question of quality. Recent FAO statistics shows that unhealthy diets, combined with sedentary lifestyles, have now become a leading risk factor for disability, non-communicable diseases including heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers and deaths worldwide. Over 670 million adults and 120 million boys and girls (aged 5-19) are obese with 40 million children (under age 5) are overweight. Different forms of malnutrition can co-exist within the same household and can be passed from one generation to the next. Health problems linked to obesity also cost national budgets worldwide an estimated USD 2 trillion in treatment each year. There is therefore an urgent need to make healthy and sustainable diets affordable and accessible to everyone.

In the context of Afghanistan, according to Afghanistan Living Condition Survey (ALCS) published by National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) more than 40% people are food insecure. Guaranteeing availability and access to healthy diets therefore remains an enormous challenge.

“Last winter we witnessed good precipitation across the country, and that is the reason today our beloved country has experienced improved food security. Unlike previous years, we had enough water to use for agriculture production and we have seen a tremendous increase in the number of grain,
fruits, and vegetable production. Another great achievement is that we have also experienced 80% self-sufficiency in the poultry industry. MAIL will continue working closely with other government agencies, national and international organizations in Afghanistan to improve nutrition and food safety”, said Hashmatullah Ghafouri, the Acting Minister for MAIL.

“We have to promote healthy diets for life. We understand the critical time for human beings from conception to 2 years of age as the window of opportunity where good nutrition is pivotal. But, that is not the only time nutrition is important. Malnutrition can happen at any stage of life and have detrimental effects on health, educational attainment, productivity, and on all aspects of life. Hence, we will strive collectively to make healthy diets available for all” said Parvathy Ramaswami, WFP Deputy Country Director and Officer-in-Charge in Afghanistan.

“This dairy plant will take the country’s dairy sector to a higher level, and dairy farming will be one of the important livelihoods and commercial opportunities for Afghan farmers in future”, expressed H.E. MAIL Minister Nasir Ahmad Durrani.

“FAO has utilized its strong technical capabilities and endeavored over the past decade to support Afghanistan in dairy sector. Today, FAO is very pleased to witness the establishment of the first dairy plant in Afghanistan producing UHT milk. It is a milestone for Afghanistan and for the collaboration between FAO and MAIL. I invite you to join us to celebrate this happy moment. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to IFAD for making it possible through their generous funding”, said FAO Representative in Afghanistan Mr. Rajendra Aryal.

This dairy plant is one of the major outputs of the Integrated Dairy Scheme (IDS) Project funded by International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and implemented by FAO with a total budget of about USD 8.5 million. The project, implemented between 2014 and 2022 focuses on promoting sustainable livelihoods improvement of dairy farmers by supporting them in increased milk production, connecting them to raw milk collection networks, and establishing milk processing and marketing centers. More than 3,000 dairy farmers in 35 village-level cooperatives in Kabul, Parwan and Logar provinces have so far benefited from the project. The establishment of this new dairy plant will also enable these dairy farmers to link their products with larger markets.

FAO and MAIL support the establishment of Afghanistan’s first multi-product milk processing plant

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) jointly supported the establishment of the first ever multi product milk processing plant in Afghanistan.

This dairy plant will have the capacity to produce and store 30,000 liters of Ultra-high Temperature (UHT) processed milk. This represents a turning point to scale up the Afghan dairy sector and contributes to import substitution of dairy products in the country.

Establishment of UHT processing plant is very relevant to the Afghan context. UHT milk is the most favored imported dairy product available in Afghan markets. As UHT milk has a shelf life of over six months without refrigeration, excess milk during the high milk production season can be processed into UHT products, and can be marketed during the low milk production seasons.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- FAO calls for action across all sectors for addressing and achieving “Healthy Diet for a Zero Hunger World”.
- FAO and MAIL support the establishment of Afghanistan’s first multi-product milk processing plant
- FAO and MAIL officially launch the establishment of Afghanistan’s first Geographical Indication (GI) System
- Increased support for Afghan farmers hit by conflict and natural disasters
FAO and MAIL officially launch the establishment of Afghanistan’s first Geographical Indication (GI) System

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) conducted an inception workshop for a newly signed project that is called Geographical Indication (GI) system in Kabul.

The objective of the inception workshop was to present the project, disseminate information about the GI system and collect feedback from the stakeholders for the successful implementation of the project.

The workshop was attended by high officials from MAIL, Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC), European Union, FAO and other relevant authorities from the government and private sector.

This project will allow the Afghan Government to set up a national GI system, which will help increase the income of the smallholder producers and agribusinesses in the prioritized GI value chain and allow the Afghan producers to introduce quality products to the regional and global markets.

This three-year project is implemented in two phases. This first phase involves a series of interventions as regards GI legislation, policies, capacity development, product identification, control, quality assurance, verification and certification. The second phase of the project, which is expected to begin in 2020-2021, will focus on increasing the income of smallholder producers and agribusinesses through the development of three pilot GI value chains, improved market access and increased recognition of Afghan GI by consumers.

What is Geographical Indication (GI) system?

A Geographical Indication (GI) is an Intellectual Property Right allowing to protect a name or sign used to identify products originating from a specific geographical location or origin (e.g., a town, region, or country) where a specific quality, reputation or other characteristics of these products are essentially linked to their origin. Thousands of GI products have been registered in the world. Asia is becoming the most active region in terms of GI registration and development after Europe.

“Lack of access to the regional and international market is the main challenges we are facing in Afghanistan and this is due to the non-standard processing and packaging of products. This project will undoubtedly bring profitable income to smallholder producers and open a new window to the trade sector of Afghanistan”, said H.E. Naseer Ahmad Durrani, MAIL Minister.

“Our project of launching Geographical Indications is part of a concerted effort to improve living conditions in rural areas, to increase the productivity and the quality standards of farming in Afghanistan in order to boost the export economy, to create jobs and to fight poverty”, said Andreas Fischer-Barnicol, Deputy Head of the European Union.

“The development of GI is the best tool for promoting Afghan products and protecting Afghanistan’s heritage. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Government of Afghanistan for taking the lead on this important activity and to the European Union (EU) for supporting the development of Afghanistan’s first GI system”, said Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

The project is implemented under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) with technical support by FAO. The project is funded by the European Union (EU).
Vulnerable farming families to receive livelihoods assistance via a new FAO-led project funded by the Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

The Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) has contributed $9.5 million to an FAO-led project that aims to boost the resilience of farmers affected by conflict and natural disasters in 16 of Afghanistan’s most food insecure provinces, the two partners announced today.

Over 10 million people in Afghanistan are now coping with severe acute food insecurity and in need of urgent humanitarian support, according to a report issued last week by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative (IPC).

The new FAO project will work to enhance the resilience against future shocks of over 660,000 people belonging to nearly 100,000 households whose livelihoods have been affected by conflict and natural disasters, with the provision of essential agriculture inputs in particular improved and certified wheat seed, fertilizer, and training on improved agriculture practices.

This will enable highly vulnerable small farming households to grow wheat during the upcoming cultivation season and contribute to higher farm yields, boosting people’s food self-sufficiency and generating surpluses that can be used as seed stock or sold for profit. The AHF is administered by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) under the leadership of the Humanitarian Coordinator.

"The impact of the 2018 drought and 2019 floods, exacerbated by the protracted conflict, has been devastating for smallholder farmers, impeding their ability to cultivate large plots of land or carry over surplus seed stocks for use in future planting. It disrupted local markets as well. This meant zero or little availability of local or improved varieties of seed within local communities," said Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

"This AHF assistance will restore access by food insecure farmers to certified seed for the upcoming season, protecting their livelihoods and the main source of food and income for their families. FAO is extremely grateful to the AHF for this time critical support," he added.
Under the project, each beneficiary family will receive inputs sufficient to plant around half a hectare with wheat, allowing them to grow and harvest more than 900 kg of the staple grain. That’s enough to cover their household consumption needs for one year as well as possibly generate surpluses.

All told, the AHF-supported FAO distributions are expected to result in a total gross wheat production of 113,200 metric tonnes in 2020.

Deliveries and training will be implemented by FAO in close collaboration with NGO partners of the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster and the Afghanistan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) in Badakhshan, Kunduz, Faryab, Saripul, Samangan, Daikundi, Nimroz, Nuristan, Helmand, Kandahar, Bamyan, Badghis, Farah, Herat, Ghor and Wardak provinces.

“Farmers are key to ensure food production in Afghanistan and yet they have limited access to good quality seeds and other essential farming inputs,” said Toby Lanzer, the UN’s Humanitarian Coordinator in Afghanistan. “This time critical allocation to FAO and partners will protect farmers’ livelihoods and enable them to cultivate wheat during the ongoing season, which is vital in fighting the widespread food insecurity that is affecting so many vulnerable people”, he added.

Small farms key to food security, yet highly vulnerable

Around 70 percent of Afghans rely on agriculture for their livelihoods, making the sector critical to poverty reduction and food security. At the same time, most farmers in the country are smallholders (67.5 percent) who work in irrigated plots generally ranging from just half a hectare to a hectare and a half.

Many smallholders in marginal areas of the country are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, food insecurity and seed insecurity. Their lack of physical and economic access to farming inputs as well as escalation prices for those inputs are a large part of the challenge.

Afghan farmers are also affected by declining soil fertility, leading to an increase in the use of marginal and fragile lands. Drought and floods tied to climate change are also a growing threat. In order to build resilience of communities and ecosystems to drought, FAO is also supporting MAIL in the formulation of a long-term national drought risk management strategy.