

Towards food security and well-being in Kyrgyzstan

Danakan and Kaldarbek Baymurzaev are living in a small and remote village in Jalalabad province. They have seven sons, five grandchildren, and another on the way. All of their children, except one, graduated university. And all of them returned home to work on the family's 5-acre plot of land. At first, they only grew cotton. But with the help of a project implemented by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), funded by Austrian Government, they were able to diversify the crop production to include wheat, maize, onions and other vegetables. This made a dramatic difference in their well-being on many levels.



Danakan is proudly talking about her children.

Photo by Olga Grebennikova. FAO in the Kyrgyz Republic. 2012

"God has sent us good sons, and the sons brought home the best daughters-in-law. And that is our main wealth," says Danakan proudly, watching as her daughters-in-law dexterously cook plov, bake bread in a tandoori oven, fire up the samovar for the guests and manage to look after the children.

The large family continues to live in a cramped workers' house which was inherited by Danakan and Kaldarbek from the former collective farm. However, with the help of the project, their eldest son was able to buy a little house in the same village. In addition, the family has started to build an extension another son's family in the courtyard. And here, in the courtyard sits a brightly painted old, but clean little foreign car.

The Baymurzaevs are one of the hundreds of farming families covered by FAO's project being implemented in Jalalabad province. The project strives to modernize irrigation and train local small farmers to use advanced irrigation technologies. And they are one of the families that work tirelessly every day to create the foundations for stability in Kyrgyzstan: food security and well-being.

Kaldarbek, along with his wife and sons, has taken part actively in all the training events organized by FAO specialists.

"Earlier we just grew cotton on our land. The specialists told us recently that in addition to cotton we could also successfully grow vegetables, maize and wheat, and they even advised us on which seeds to use, how to tend these crops well, and how to water them properly and protect them from pests," explain Kaldarbek. "Last year we had a good harvest of onions, sold it at good prices and now we've even been able to buy a car!"

Also, 25 farmers were trained to become trainers in Farmers' Field Schools. In one of these Farmer' Schools Kaldarbek and his sons together with other farmers from the village are getting the most needed for them to be successful in agriculture – knowledge and lessons learnt by practitioners.



Kaldarbek is a good member of the local water users association. He uses irrigation water in accordance with the schedule created with other farmers.

Photo by Olga Grebennikova. FAO in the Kyrgyz Republic. 2012

“Our lives have changed,” says Danakan. “Before, we had to face our problems ourselves. Now we can resolve any issues or problems at the Farmers’ Field Schools. And the trainers always have answers to our questions. When we’re all together it’s easier to live and work,” she adds.



Kalmurzaev’s family is harvesting maize of 2012.

Photo by Olga Grebennikova. FAO in the Kyrgyz Republic

Water is scarce in the region. Thanks to the project, hydro-technology specialists together with farmers have been trained how to modernize their irrigation systems using FAO’s methodology. They learned effective techniques how to level their land, manage crops, and how to use water judiciously. The project also introduced a number of methods for the farmers’ irrigation systems. For example, they learnt how to keep channels clean, how to build, use effectively and maintain simple sluices helping to get enough water,

how to measure water and plan its distribution. A schedule for allocating and distributing water, which farmers developed with support of the project, helped

them to get almost unlimited access to water, even in this unusually dry 2012.

“In Central Asia, and particularly here, in the densely populated Fergana Valley, every drop of water is worth its weight in gold,” says Matraim Jusupov, the national project manager. “Therefore, effective and rational water use will allow for not just an increase in the standard of living of the population, but also remove a potential source of conflict.”

One of the most impressive results of the project is the fact that agricultural production has increased by 50 percent in all pilot districts of the province. This gives hope that the similar project will be implemented in all the districts of the country.

“We hope,” say Danakan and Kaldarbek, “that our children and grandchildren will live better than us, and that they will never face need.”

By Olga Grebennikova, Communication Expert, FAO in the Kyrgyz Republic. August 2012