

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

*- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -
Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad*

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Veggie Ban Is No Joke – On April 1 the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture banned imports of tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, onions, green beans, okra and squash. The government’s intent is to protect Iraqi producers from import competition. Iraqi vegetable production has expanded in recent years, especially through the use of greenhouses, but Iraqi quality and marketing practices are not yet at an international level. Imports bans were first used for vegetables in May 2009 and seasonal imports bans also exist for corn and other grains. The bans contribute to higher food prices and, in the case of feed, to low meat and dairy consumption levels.

U.S. Supported Meat and Fish Markets Open - PRT Wasit, with the Ministry of Municipality and Public Works, has invested nearly \$6-million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) to construct two large and modern meat and fish markets. Space in the markets is available for lease by Wasit farmers, fishermen and vendors following the grand opening on March 20. The Grand Al Kut Meat Market Project has 21,500 square meters of indoor retail space. The fish market has 16,000 square meters, including 24 fish tanks.



June Ag Trade Mission Planning –So far 27 U.S. companies have signed up to participate in the first U.S. ag trade mission to Iraq in decades. FAS Administrator John Brewer will lead the U.S. team. Darrell Upshaw is the FAS POC for this event.

Ag Iraqi Graduate Studies Update - DoD’s Task Force to Improve Business and Stability Operations-Iraq is providing funding USDA/FAS to manage a master's studies program to enhance the sustainability of USG efforts in Iraq. Twelve Iraqis arrived in College Station, Texas, on February 18 to begin their English language training at Texas A&M’s English Language Institute (ELI). They joined 4 Iraqis already at the university, bringing the total number to 16. Two of these original students have since returned to Iraq due to difficulties in adjustment. It is anticipated that 23 others will be joining the program in the first week of May. USDA/FAS is a partner with Texas A&M’s Borlaug Institute in implementing this program.

Wheat Tender – On April 3 we learned the Iraq Grain Board awarded 350,000 MT in wheat contracts, including 100,000 MT of U.S. wheat. Russian and Canadian wheat accounted for the balance. Tendering for a minimum of 60,000 MT of rice closes on April 25th and another wheat tender for at least 100,000 MT will be announced in this week with an April 26th close.

Personnel Update – There are currently 38 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provisional Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, or embedded with U.S. military units.

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