

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

- Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq -
Office of Agricultural Affairs, U.S. Embassy, Baghdad
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U.S. Agribusiness Firms Find Partners in Baghdad - USDA organized a successful Agribusiness Trade Mission from June 7-9. Seventeen U.S. companies traveled to Baghdad and over 250 Iraqi companies registered to participate. There were dozens of matchmaking meetings between American and selected Iraqi firms as well as meetings with Ministry of Trade procurement agencies. In addition, the U.S. Ambassador Hill and Minister of Trade Safi spoke at a plenary event that was heavily covered by local media. This was the first large public trade event for U.S. firms in Baghdad in years and is visible evidence of the private sector's pragmatism about security concerns and U.S. commitment to the Strategic Framework Agreement. The event's success highlights the potential to promote trade in support of both Iraq's economy and U.S. business interests. Iraq imported over \$100 million in U.S. agricultural products in the first three months of 2010, mostly wheat and poultry. One objective of the Trade Mission is to expand private trade to include critically needed agricultural inputs such as animal feed, seeds, and irrigation equipment. The USDA/Washington delegation to this event was headed by FAS Assistant Deputy Administrator Dan Berman.



Ambassador Hill & Trade Minister Safi

USDA attends Balad Agricultural Conference – To familiarize themselves with Iraqi agricultural issues, FAS Assistant Deputy Administrators Dan Berman and Gary Groves traveled to an agricultural conference



Dan Berman & Gary Groves in Balad

June 9 organized by PRT Balad, which is located north of Baghdad. The local farmers who attended the conference were given the chance to ask Berman and Groves questions relating to USDA programs. PRT Agricultural Advisor Franklin Johnson said. "It was constructive, but you can see the farmers are upset — going from a command economy that was heavily subsidized by the government, to a capitalist economy where farmers have to compete, and purchase their own fertilizers and seeds," he said. "There's still some angry sentiment there, but they're pushing through these problems, and in the end they will be successful."

USDA Efforts To Improve Feed Situation – From June 14- 17, Agricultural Counselor Ron Verdonk led a team of senior Iraqi officials from the Ministries of Agricultural and Trade and the Prime Minister's office to the Jordanian port of Aqaba. The purpose of the visit is to convince Iraq to reform its feed import testing procedures. High feed prices contribute to Iraq's very low per capita consumption of meat and, consequently, unmet farmer and consumer expectations. Iraq is not currently using its seaports to import corn and soybean meal because a complex 14 step feed testing procedure creates too much administrative risk for private shippers. In contrast, Jordan has a four step procedures that functions well. This activity was paid for with State Department funding and was organized with help of ASA-IM. Iraq could quickly become a 1 million ton market for U.S. feeds if the import system is reformed.

Personnel Update- There are currently 32 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, or embedded with U.S. military units.

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