

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

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

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Former Trade Minister Cleared on One Charge of Corruption: A Baghdad court cleared former Minister of Trade Falah al-Sudani of one of two counts of corruption stemming from procurement deals for Iraq's large public distribution system (PDS) food program. Judge Abdul-Sattar Bayrkdar reported on April 29 the court lacked sufficient evidence for a conviction and that the ex-Minister remained free on bail, pending the court hearing of a second (and final) charge against him. Sudani, a member of the Prime Minister's Da'wa Party, resigned in May 2009 after allegations that he had been involved in importing sugar at inflated prices, defrauding the government of tens of millions of dollars. Other Ministry of Trade officials were sentenced in December 2009. The United States is a large supplier of wheat and rice to the PDS.

Fish Retail Outlet & Association Headquarters Opens – On April 8, the Iraqi Society for Fish Production dedicated its new headquarters and first retail outlet. Using a \$1 million Targeted Development Program grant, the award-winning 120 member NGO is now well positioned to increase fish production and employment in the Babil region. The grant funded a modern R&D hatchery, is establishing five retail fish markets, extension services, and a seal of quality. The program was led by the Babil PRT and USAID/Inma. Another result of this activity: the Iraqi Society for Fish Production has developed a close working relationship with the Provincial Department of Agriculture through their research and training programs.

Kurdistan Adds Its Own Vegetable and Fruit Import Ban – On April 27, the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources announced 20 separate seasonal bans on vegetable and fruit imports to protect farmers from foreign competition. The KRG notice follows the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture April 1 announcement banning imports of seven vegetables.

Wheat Procurement Price – On May 2nd, Iraq's Ministry of Trade's Agricultural Committee announced procurement prices for new crop wheat and barley. The Iraqi harvest of these grains is underway. The new #1 wheat procurement price has been set at 650,000 dinars, or approximately \$556.50/MT, a drop of 25% from the price paid for wheat harvested in 2009. The 2010 barley procurement price was cut by 38% to 450,000 Iraqi Dinars, approximately \$385.25.

June 7-9 Ag Trade Mission Planning Continues – So far 24 U.S. companies have signed up to participate in the first U.S. agricultural trade mission to Iraq in decades. USDA/FAS Assistant Deputy Administrator Dan Berman is leading this mission. For details, please contact Darrell Upshaw (Darrell.Upshaw@fas.usda.gov).

Personnel Update – There are currently 38 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, or embedded with U.S. military units. Tours are ending soon for both Glenn Brown (PRT West) and Charlie Russell (PRT South) – Thank you both for your service!

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