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FAO Iraq
Emergency Support to Food Insecure Rural Households through
Establishing Home Gardens in Iraq

FAO-Iraq supporting rural households by improving their food security and nutrition.

The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is supporting drought-stricken rural households in Iraq by helping families establish home gardens and backyard gardening in an effort to increase food production and household nutrition levels.

Through the generous contribution of USD 3 million from AusAID, FAO-Iraq will assist food insecure rural households that are severely affected by the recent drought in Iraq. Through the distribution of high quality, high-yielding seeds, fertilizers and agriculture supplies to establish home vegetable gardens for both the summer and winter seasons leading to year-round production and enhanced labour productivity.

“The project will focus on improving the food security and nutrition status of the most vulnerable rural households” said Dr. Fadel El Zubi, Head of FAO-Iraq. “In addition to the high level of food insecurity and malnutrition among the Iraqi population, the impact of the drought in Iraq has further aggravated the food security and nutrition situation. There is now an urgent need for rapid assistance to rural households to produce fresh vegetables in their home gardens as a means of improving nutrition within a short span of time.”

The concept of home gardening or kitchen gardening involves cultivation of common vegetable crops in a small piece of land near the family home in which the family handles all the gardening and cultivation. These efforts help increase food production and family nutrition levels. Primarily the aim is to meet the family needs throughout the year; however surplus production could be sold in the market or to neighbours for additional income generation.

Dr. El Zubi explained that this ‘home garden’ project falls within the FAO / Government of Iraq Medium Term Strategy that was launched in April 2008. Iraq, in partnership with the international community, has recognized the importance of agriculture for the substantive role it plays in the overall economic and social development of the country. The agriculture strategy seeks to make a contribution to this process and examine ongoing policy, economic and social developments, as well as review the work done so far by FAO to help in the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector of Iraq. It is a flexible medium term strategy for FAO assistance to the agriculture sector in the transition from emergency to development.

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Background

Iraqi citizens depend largely for their basic food items on the public distribution system, but this excludes fresh food such as vegetables. The 2006 Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis in Iraq found that poor households lacked the purchasing power to supplement the ration with fresh vegetables. Decades of conflict have had serious effects on Iraqis which consequently resulted in elevated unemployment and loss of wage earning powers. The UN WFP Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA) of 2008 estimates that 3.1 percent of Iraq's population is food insecure with a further 9.4 percent in danger of slipping from vulnerable to food insecurity. The national average malnutrition of

Iraq is estimated at 4.7 percent acute malnutrition, 21.8 percent chronic malnutrition and 9.1 percent underweight (CFSVA 2008). The recent drought conditions experienced in the north, central as well as the marshlands in the south of Iraq have further decreased the production level of the food crops including of vegetables. This has seriously impacted nutritional level of food insecure vulnerable rural households, and in particular of children and women.

Vegetables are good sources of vitamins and minerals for improved nutrition of the vulnerable people. In Iraq's crop production and food system, vegetables occupy an important place with estimated 9.7 percent of the cropped area being under vegetable cultivation. The Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) estimated that in 2007, the major vegetables (tomato, eggplant, watermelon, okra, lettuce, onion, cauliflower, cucumber and gourd) were planted in an area of 230 000 ha with fresh produce amounting to 3 million tonnes. It is estimated that the domestic production of vegetables meets only one-third of the national demand and the short-fall of two-third of the national requirement being met by imports from the neighboring countries. This situation provides a ready market for the surplus vegetables production from the proposed project intervention.

In Iraq, it is estimated that the prices of vegetable seeds have increased by 30 to 40 percent and fertilizer prices by nearly 100 percent. Vegetable seeds and associated inputs need to be provided so that vulnerable households can quickly start the crop production cycle by setting up home gardens.

Achievements-Seeds Programme:

FAO-Iraq has so far completed the implementation of the successful Seeds I project: "Rehabilitation and Development of National Seed Industry in Iraq" under which a Seed Policy was prepared and adopted by the GoI and a Seed Law was drafted to be presented for the Legislative Authority of Iraq-the Parliament for authentication.

FAO-Iraq is currently implementing a Seeds II project: "Rehabilitation and Development of the National Vegetable Seed Industry in Iraq" that builds up on the Seeds I project and involves components of rehabilitation of Seeds Laboratories, provision of seeds testing and laboratories equipment as well as training, capacity building and technology transfer.

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The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. FAO is also a source of knowledge and information. We help developing countries and countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices and ensure good nutrition for all. Since our founding in 1945, we have focused special attention on developing rural areas, home to 70 percent of the world's poor and hungry people.

FAO in Iraq is implementing a US \$ 123 million operation; in addition to the Seeds programme, the FAO-Iraq operations covers programmes in Water Resources, Fisheries, Agriculture Governance, Agro-Industries, Date Palm and Livestock Services as well as Veterinary Services.

Further information can be found on the FAO-Iraq website: www.faoiraq.org