

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack in Afghanistan meets with Afghan President Karzai & farmers

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Kabul, Afghanistan, Jan. 10 – On Sunday, the first day of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack’s three-day visit to Afghanistan, Vilsack met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Afghan Agriculture Minister Mohammad Asif Rahimi, and farmers interested in getting U.S. help to return to the days when Afghanistan was a major exporter of agricultural products including high-value fruits, nuts and vegetables.

One of the major problems which has faced on-going U.S. efforts to boost agricultural production here is that elaborate irrigation systems built with U.S. help decades ago were deliberately dismantled by the Soviet military when its plan was to clear the ungovernable countryside and move people into cities. Current U.S. programs include restoring the irrigation systems – and supporting agriculture with a full range of services from providing improved seeds, teaching farming skills, providing credit, building storage facilities including cold storage, and improving transportation so that crops can be both marketed throughout Afghanistan and exported.



Shortly after Afghanistan shipped 12 tons of Afghan apples to India, Afghan Agriculture Minister Mohammad Asif Rahimi and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack discuss opportunities with Afghan farmers. Photo: U.S. Embassy, Kabul.

Vilsack told reporters here that “Agriculture is at a critical intersection in our efforts to try to stabilize Afghanistan. If we are able to assist them in doing that, it also builds confidence in their government.” He said Afghan agriculture has tremendous potential for growth since while agriculture provides 80% of income here, that comes from only half of Afghanistan’s arable land. And much of today’s unused land could be returned to production quickly once irrigation systems are put back into service.

For background on Sec. Vilsack’s trip to Afghanistan, go to:
<http://www.agri-pulse.com/uploaded/Jan0710H3.pdf>.

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