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SNAPSHOT

Hot Tips and Cool Storage

USAID farm credit and capacity building augment efforts by international partners and Afghan ministries



Photo: USAID/Marc Bender/ACE

Farmers store potatoes in Asian Development Bank-funded cool storage. Traditional earthen pits exposed potatoes to seepage, fungus, and freezing, ruined up to 70 percent of the stored produce, and caused \$20 million in losses per season.

Better supplies, equipment, and techniques have boosted Bamyan's potato yield by nearly 30 percent.

Haqju, the head of Bamyan's Cooperatives Office, part of the Directorate of Agriculture, spends much of his time promoting the merits of cooperatives—benefits such as training, help with the construction of insulated “cool storage” facilities, access to farm equipment, and better seeds and fertilizers.

“Soviet-era cooperatives failed and collapsed,” he says, “but today's cooperatives are more efficient and effective.” Bamyan's farmers are obviously getting that message. There are already 102 cooperatives registered in the province, each averaging more than fifty active members.

The cooperatives are able to assist rural farm families in Bamyan thanks to funding from donors such as USAID.

Careful coordination among donors ensures that they complement one another's activities in agriculture and do not duplicate efforts. For example, in Bamyan, USAID trained more than 30 farm cooperative board members in the latest management, marketing, and accounting procedures. The Asian Development Bank supported the cooperatives by financing construction of cool storage facilities through its implementing partner, Roots of Peace, a non-governmental organization that works with both ADB and USAID. Roots of Peace has built nearly 1,000 potato storage units in the province.

These different forms of assistance have combined to improve farm income and generate interest in the cooperative movement. Ever more farmers are organizing themselves under the cooperative umbrella. The Asian Development Bank-funded storage units preserve perishable produce, allowing farmers to sell at peak-demand times. The USAID capacity-building trains farmers how to optimize sale of their crops for maximum advantage. Together, these efforts have enabled Bamyan's potato farmers to increase their earnings substantially.