



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

AFGHANISTAN

USAID 50 ANNIVERSARY

FIRST PERSON

Winning the War on Poppies

A farmer in southern Afghanistan makes the switch from poppies to high-value vegetables



Photo: USAID/S-RAD/IRD

“The government is telling us, get rid of your poppies. But poppies bring big money. We can’t do this without outside help.”

-- Tawoz, farmer from Zhari District, Kandahar Province

Tawoz is a farmer from the southern Afghan province of Kandahar. He and his family of 40 depend on a two-acre farm for survival. Six years ago, under pressure from local warlords, he shifted from wheat to poppy production. The income from poppy was better than what he made when he farmed wheat, but it also put him in debt to the Taliban.

As local governance improves in the volatile south, many farmers like Tawoz are looking for a way back to licit crop production. USAID project is helping thousands of these farmers make the transition with distributions of high-value vegetable seed and fertilizer. These distributions provide them with agricultural inputs necessary to build immediate financial security as well as long-term sustainability.

More than 25,000 farmers are participating in the program. Beneficiaries receive training in best horticultural practices to ensure proper seed distribution and fertilizer application. These farmers are chosen by local shuras, with distribution taking place at government distribution centers, improving the connection between farmers and their local leaders.

With only a small copayment, farmers receive a quantity of vegetable seed and urea/diammonium phosphate fertilizer sufficient for planting more than four acres of land. While assisting farmers in shifting to licit crops, USAID also steers them toward crops like tomatoes, cucumbers and eggplants that bring significantly higher yields than grains at the local market.

USAID supports government measures to halt poppy production in the opium-rich province. “The government is telling us, get rid of your poppies,” Tawoz said. “But poppies bring big money. We can’t do this without outside help.”

After collecting his seed and fertilizer, Tawoz and his sons went through the field and began destroying newly emerging poppy saplings. This year he will grow barley, radishes, musk melon, spinach, corn and other crops. “We can win the poppy war,” he said. “But we can’t do it alone.”