



ROOTS OF PEACE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT:

Heidi Kuhn/USA
(415) 455-8008
Dr. Zach Lea/Kabul
+93-794-677-212

“BIG BUZZ” AMONG ALMOND FARMERS IN AFGHANISTAN

Roots of Peace and European Community Teach Afghan Almond Growers How to Increase Almond Production by 40% with Honey Bees

NOVEMBER 16, 2009—KABUL, AFGHANISTAN—Afghan farmers are “buzzing” with the news of that a dramatic 40% improvement in their yields can result from the use of bees to aid pollination of the almond flowers. Traditionally, many Afghan almond growers have mistakenly assumed that bees were responsible for REDUCING almond production by “sucking the life from the almond flowers.” When Roots of Peace (ROP) began introducing bees to almond growers, many refused. Now, after several seasons of promoting the idea, almond growers are convinced. This year the message is spreading from farmer to farmer as they discuss the results of a recent ROP demonstration of the impact of bees on almond yield per tree. The increase in yield was large enough to be obvious and impressive to the farmers. They have been “stung” with the results. The word is also being spread by the Afghanistan Almond Industry Development Organization (AAIDO), a new industry group set up under the leadership of Roots of Peace, an American NGO.

In spite of its use of tradition-bound almond production techniques, Afghanistan produces some of the highest-valued almonds in the world. Recently, almond growers received \$10/kg for their soft-shell *Sattarbai* type which is sold in specialty markets in India. Production reported this year by the Afghan government ranks Afghanistan as the world’s 4th largest producer of almonds---still a distant competitor when compared to other major producer nations. But, with almond growers adopting the world-class production techniques promoted by the European Commission’s Perennial Horticulture Development Project, production in Afghanistan is expected to increase rapidly over the next 5-10 years, restoring pride in Afghan farmers for their country which was once known as “The Garden of Central Asia.”



Without bees, most of these almond flowers will not be pollinated and will not produce almonds

Picture taken in Ghorband Valley, Mar 19, 2006 by Z. Lea.



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Background:

The European Commission has been engaged with the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan since 2001 and pledged € 1.6 billion for the period 2002 – 2010, out of which more than € 1.4 billion have been committed and already € 1.2 billion disbursed, demonstrating that the European Commission is fulfilling its commitments efficiently. The EC current multi-annual programme for the period 2007 - 2010 concentrates on the priority areas of Governance, Health and Rural development. The Governance programme includes support to the police, justice, border management and customs, local governance, public administration reform, human rights and counter-narcotics.

The European Commission is the executive body of the European Union (EU). The Delegation of European Commission to Afghanistan, as others EC Delegations in the world, represents the European Union and play a key role in the implementation of European external assistance. The European Commission and the 27 Member States of the European Union have pledged together more than one third of the aid pledged by the international community to Afghanistan, as confirmed in June 2008 at the Paris Conference.

For further information about the EC programme in horticulture in Afghanistan, please contact:

Greg Cullen
Team Leader
PHDP
Email: afghanistanhorticulture@gmail.com
Website: www.afghanistanhorticulture.org
Mobile: +93 (0) 799 82 59 14

Meghna Singh
Task Manager, Media and Communication
Delegation of the European Commission to Afghanistan
Email: meghna.singh@ec.europa.eu
Mobile: +93 (0) 799 44 39 11

Roots of Peace (ROP) is a U.S. humanitarian non-profit organization transforming toxic minefields into bountiful agricultural fields worldwide. In Afghanistan, Roots of Peace has actively worked in 23 of the 34 provinces since 2001. Working with Afghan farmers in Fall 2009, we have exported over an historic 1000 metric tons of fresh fruits across borders to Pakistan and India—600 metric tons of fresh grapes and 400 metric tons of apples. The result has been an increase of income to thousands of Afghan farmers by improving value chains by building markets. For further information, please visit www.rootsofpeace.org.

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