



## For Immediate Release

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### **Agricultural Conference Brings Partners Together**

**Zabul, Afghanistan**-“Work hard, work fast and work together because together we win.” were part of the opening remarks by the Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), Minister Rahimi, at the Joint American Afghanistan National Agriculture Conference held at the Serena Hotel in Kabul, Afghanistan on Nov 28. Minister Rahimi’s remarks set the tone for all the more than 350 attendees which included U.S. Ambassador Eikenberry, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Deputy Under Secretary Darci Vetter, newly appointed Agriculture Czar for Afghanistan, Dr. Jim Butler, Provincial Directors of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAILs) from all of Afghanistan’s 34 Provinces , the nine U.S. Army National Guard ‘s Agribusiness Development Teams (ADTs), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) representatives serving on various Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), members of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and employees of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Representing Zabul Province were the DAIL of Zabul, Bismullah Harifal, and his Deputy, Hamidullah. For Zabul's ADT from the Arkansas National Guard, Agricultural Specialists First Lieutenant Addison Taylor, Air Force Master Sergeant Paul Fair, and Sergeant Eric Holcomb were in attendance. Additionally, Zabul's USDA Representative, Mr. Christophe Greco of the Zabul PRT and Lt. Col. Chris Wooten representing Combined Team Zabul and 2d Stryker Cavalry Regiment, were also in attendance.

This occasion served as the first time during our 9 year tenure in Afghanistan where all agriculture support elements assembled in one location for collaboration and calibration. In the two days prior, the members of the ADTs, PRTs, ISAF, and USAID as well as over 200 national and provincial Afghan agricultural counterparts met for working group discussions and break-out sessions to tackle the strategic and operational issues surrounding agricultural stability and productivity throughout Afghanistan.

Some of the topics discussed included Risk Management Strategies to Minimize Animal and Plant Health Risks, Large and Small Scale Watershed Management, National Wheat Seed Distribution, microfinance opportunities MAIL to DAIL Operations, ADT Operations, and DAIL Regional Priorities. As consistent themes, partnership and team work were pervasive throughout each panel and group discussion. Best practices and success stories from across the country were openly shared and discussed. These will be taken back to their respective teams for future partnership opportunities as well as shaping and developing future operations.

Regionally, the Southern Region DAILs Top 3 Priorities included irrigation system expansion and rehabilitation, market facilities improvement for purposes of economic expansion, and credit for farmers and local agribusinesses. An additional concern for the Southern Region DAILs surrounded extension agents, finding qualified individuals to fill the vacant positions and the education requirements needed. "[We] must increase the province salary for the agricultural

employees. You cannot put uneducated farmers that do not know science as extension agents and have them teach.” said Zabul’s DAIL, Bismullah Harifal. Other projects of interest to ADTs included check dam construction, cooperative development, demonstration farms and range land management.

At the closing remarks, Ambassador Eikenberry recalled seeing raisins from Afghanistan in the grocery store when he was growing up embossed with the special stamp of Afghanistan. He expressed his desire to see this again, encouraging further team work in order to have agriculture products of Afghanistan return to stores and dining room tables across America. This was met with thunderous applause, cheers and smiles from all in attendance as hope springs eternal from momentous events such as these.

And hope continues for the farmers of Zabul. As a result of the networking and cross communication that occurs at events such as this, Zabul officials and coalition forces will be negotiating, marketing and partnering with potential buyers, juice processors, and exporters at Bagram Airfield later this month in order to secure markets for the farmers of Zabul.



Lt. Colonel Roger L. Beekman, ADT LNO, CJ9, CJTF-101 for RC East, addresses ADT Commanders and other U.S. Military attendees during a breakout session at Camp Integrity on the first day of the conference in order to discuss current and future ADT dispositions and operations.