

Success Story

Saffron Enterprise-Hirat Province Established/ facilitated by MRRD/NABDP/UNDP

Saffron is the world's most expensive and precious spice. Well renowned as the world's most exclusive spice, saffron has the potential to replace some of the income generated through illegal opium cultivation. Making saffron one of the few legal crops that can compete on income poppy cultivation.

In Afghanistan, the cultivation of saffron has been promoted since 1992 in Ghoryan district when the Afghan refugees returned from Iran and few of them who had experience in saffron cultivation in Iran transferred saffron corms and cultivated in Ghoryan.



UNDP/ NABDP Saffron Enterprises

It was gradually propagated throughout Afghanistan via Ghoryan saffron producers who were the pioneers of saffron promotion in Afghanistan. DACAAR then transferred the saffron corms from Ghoryan to Pashtoon Zarghoon district, Hirat province in 1998.

Saffron has been recently promoted tremendously in Afghanistan. This is because of saffron price has significantly increased. Thus, wide-range of farmers has been turning to saffron production and currently it is the unique economic competitive edge produced in Afghanistan's agriculture system especially in Herat.

In the past, saffron promotion was very slow; it was due to lower market price of saffron. Thus, farmers were not very interested in saffron cultivation and promotion. Saffron producers were mainly running business on saffron corms rather than saffron production which are more valuable rather the corm. Fortunately, farmers due to a high boost in saffron price have recently turned to saffron production rather than saffron corm business. Based on a research we had in Ghoryan district, farmers are not willing to root out and sell one kg of saffron corm even it ages 4 or 5 years.

Saffron has many usages. The most frequent use is for spice market .The vast majority of saffron consumed in the world market is for spice. Cosmetics perfumes, facial creams, and medicals are other usages. Saffron is also used for traditional healing.

Saffron constitutes a good alternative to opium; economic margins are still favorable to opium, the gross margins of saffron however are higher per hectare when compared to wheat. Saffron production is eight times more than agriculture

produce while opium production is nine times more as compared to agriculture produce. So, saffron could be a good substitute to opium.

The current saffron enterprises are facilitated/ established by MRRD/NABDP/UDNP. These enterprises propose is to organize and support various associations, and to establish three saffron processing enterprises in two districts of Hirat province. Also, help farmers/ associations produce clean and high quality saffron.

The main markets for Afghan saffron are Iran, India, Dubai, and Pakistan. Afghan saffron is almost unknown in the world market and is often packaged as Iranian saffron. Production in Afghanistan is still small (around 400-600Kg per year), from a total area under cultivation of 90 ha. Around 1,100 small producers grow saffron, 30% of them organized into 5 associations in Pashtun Zarghun.

In order to support/ organize these associations, technical support (infrastructure improvement, machinery purchase, and technical training) was required to be provided to the entrepreneur(s)/association(s). Therefore, the MRRD/NABDP/UNDP has taken the initiative to provide the above mentioned support to the entrepreneur(s)/association(s).

The enterprise is established to distribute 20 saffron drying machines, 10 power generators, business management, and marketing trainings, as well as to provide techniques to support producers associations in gaining the best possible quality for saffron products. It is anticipated that by providing the required technical support by MRRD/NABDP/UNDP, the saffron produced with good quality will attract international buyers and domestic market. Additionally, a grading system will be established where saffron prices will be determined as per quality.

Furthermore, to align with the UNDP-MRRD objectives, two hundred jobs will be created during first five years; fifty percent of the whole jobs will be dedicated for women. Thus, first year sales of the enterprise will reach to 100 Kg; amounting US\$ 120, 000/-.