



Planting of the National Collection of Varieties of Fruits and Nuts in Afghanistan and distribution of planting material for Mother Stock Nurseries and Orchards Variety Demonstrations around Afghanistan

Kabul, 10 March 2009/ 20 Hut 1387

Traditionally, horticulture is a strong sector in the Afghan economy, very important for the livelihoods of million of families. The range of varieties of fruits and nuts grown in the country is unequalled. Proper utilization of these varieties for export as fresh or dried fruits and nuts offers great potential for raising the standard of living for many people in Afghanistan. The correct use of these varieties is not well known, and some of the best varieties of fruits and nuts are grown only in their original areas in Afghanistan. In order to assess the value of these varieties and provide the best named varieties to the fruit growers, the Perennial Horticulture Development Project (PHDP), funded by the European Union, has collected all the varieties of fruits and nuts grown in Afghanistan into the National Collection of Varieties of Fruits and Nuts in Afghanistan.

The Perennial Horticulture Development Project has just completed an exercise to label, lift, pack and ship 30,000 fruit tree saplings and rooted vine cuttings of 600 different types of fruit and nut around the country. Over 6,000 saplings and vines have been moved from the six Perennial Horticulture Development Centres in Herat, Kandahar, Jalalabad, Kunduz, Mazar and Kabul to permanent orchard sites in these six centres. 11,000 saplings have been moved from the six PHDP sites to 26 Mother Stock Nurseries belonging to 22 separate Nursery Grower Associations based in 16 different provinces in the country. 12,000 saplings have been delivered to various organisations to plant 150 Demonstration Orchards in 24 different provinces in the country. A further 8,000 trees have been supplied to Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MoAIL) demonstrations, university teaching areas, and various poor farmers as support for them. This complicated logistic operation, where the bus carrying trees past Kandahar even suffered from Taliban gunfire, was completed in forty days concentrated effort by project staff, temporary workers, and with the cooperation of many transporters, nursery grower associations and NGOs.

The National Collections of apricots, peaches, plums, almonds, grapes, figs, and pomegranates are all now established at two permanent centres, in the main growing areas for that crop. This is the first time that all the varieties of the different crops in Afghanistan have been brought together for comparison with each other. During the next few years, all these varieties will be assessed. It is expected that in about five years' time it will be possible for farmers to be appropriately advised on which are the best varieties to grow for their areas and for their markets.

At the PHD Centres where there is no national collection of that species, the project has planted some key varieties as a demonstration in that region. In addition, the project has arranged with various organisations for some 150 demonstration orchards be planted with farmers in 24 different provinces. These varieties are the same ones as in the National Collections and the project will link all the results together to ensure that the best varieties are chosen, not just for performance on a research station, but for performance in an on-farm situation.

It is expected that the farmers will come to the PHD Centres and to the various provincial demonstrations around the country, and make up their own minds which varieties they want to grow. They then need to be able to buy trees from nursery growers that are the same ones that they see in national collections and demonstrations. The PHDP has therefore distributed 11,000 trees of exactly the same varieties as in the national collections, to 26 mother stock nurseries belonging to 22 nursery associations with a membership of over 1,000 persons. These 22 private sector associations, set up under PHDP, belong to the Afghanistan National Nursery Growers' Organisation (ANNGO), which intends to follow codes of practice in the production of fruit trees to meet recognised certification standards. The first certified trees under this system will be available for sale in February 2011.

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 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 please contact:

Greg Cullen, Team Leader, PHDP, afghanistanhorticulture@gmail.com

Meghna SINGH, EC Kabul Press Officer, meghna.singh@ec.europa.eu