

## **FEATURE – USDA PARTNERS WITH AFGHANISTAN**

**INTRO:** The U-S Department of Agriculture is trying to help the war-torn nation of Afghanistan stabilize its agriculture system. The USDA's Bob Ellison has more. (1:44)

**AFGHANISTAN IN GENERAL AND ITS FARMERS IN PARTICULAR HAVE BEEN CRIPPLED BY WARFARE AND CIVIL STRIFE. AGRICULTURE SECRETARY TOM VILSACK MET WITH AFGHAN AGRICULTURE MINISTER MOHAMMAD ASIF RAHIMI IN WASHINGTON TO DISCUSS TRANSFORMING AFGHANISTAN'S FARMING SYSTEM.**

Tom Vilsack, Agriculture Secretary: Our challenge at USDA is to provide the technical experience and the expertise that we have here at USDA to provide financial resources that will allow the minister to do his work.

**RAHIMI SAYS THIRTY YEARS OF WAR HAS DECIMATED HIS NATION'S AGRICULTURE INFRASTRUCTURE.**

Mohammad Asif Rahimi, Afghanistan Agriculture Minister: It requires the capacity building and change management so that we request the United States government especially the USDA and USAID to provide the resources and technology so that we turn the ministry of the sixties into a twenty first century ministry with the ability to outreach to the farmers.

**VILSACK SAYS THE U-S IS MAKING A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT TO AFGHANISTAN, WHICH INCLUDES U-S-D-A EXPERTS ON THE GROUND.**

Vilsack: I think it's important for the Afghan people and the Afghan government to know that the United States will be with them as troops are withdrawn over time civilians will still be there working to assist this effort.

**MUCH OF AFGHANISTAN'S FARMING IS DEVOTED TO POPPIES, WHICH ARE USED TO PRODUCE OPIUM. U-S-D-A IS HELPING AFGHAN FARMERS GROW OTHER CROPS.**

Vilsack: The minister has done a very good job of explaining to farmers in Afghanistan that there is significant profit to be made.

Rahimi: Last year one hectare of poppy produced three thousand six hundred dollars for the farmers. While one hectare of pomegranate produced sixteen thousand dollars.

**IN WASHINGTON D-C FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M BOB ELLISON.**