

Transcript: USDA Video: ONCE IN A LIFETIME – USDA Agricultural Advisors in Iraq, Feb. 2009

Conley: This is the birthplace of agriculture. They've been farming here for over 7,000 years, but in the last 50 years it's been so neglected, so the opportunity to do good here is just once in a lifetime for most people.

Barbee: Back home all they watch is television and see in the evening news and it's much different than that. There's a lot of good things happening here.

Huston: When we leave here successfully it's going to be in part based on what the USDA Agricultural Advisors have done.

Brooke: Most of the direct feedback we've had from the Iraqi farmers has been really positive. They seem to be excited to have us. We also hear their frustrations too.

Carrigan: They are in dire need of some help and so any assistance we can give you feel good about that and I think they feel good about it as well.

Brewster: Working over here is probably the most difficult job I've ever had, but at the same time it is the most rewarding job I've ever had as well.

#### ONCE IN A LIFETIME USDA Agricultural Advisors In Iraq

Ryan Crocker, U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, 2007-2009: Historically agriculture has been key to Iraq's economy and development. Even today it employs about 25% of the workforce and it generates almost 10% of the GDP even in this oil economy. And the potential is huge. Iraq is the only middle eastern country that has a real abundance of water with the two great river systems, the Tigris and the Euphrates, flowing through the country.

Stephen Morin, U.S. Agency for International Development: Particularly in Diyala, where 70% of the population is involved in agriculture.

It's the key employment sector. Unfortunately it's very underperforming, that it doesn't employ nearly as many people and not to the level that they could be employed. So getting them to improve their production systems to improve marketing, to improve processing all those things help to employ people and to make life better.

Jim Conley, USDA Liaison, Office of Provincial Affairs: We've had USDA Ag Advisors here for a year. I think the most progress

we've made is those projects that we work on that build capacity with the Iraqis. We try to help the Iraqis learn new technical skills, new management skills, and try to put those to work to improve the agriculture in Iraq.

Joseph Carrigan, USDA Ag Advisor, Al-Anbar Province: You almost need to be a generalist here, not a specialist. For example I'm a range and animal science person and yet here in Al-Anbar the issues are more agronomic, but as a generalist I've ended up working with honey bees.

William Huston, USDA Ag Advisor, Diyala Province: In this province they have over 18,000 hives. Diyala has been known as the bee capital of Iraq. All their vegetables require pollination and bees are the best pollinators they have here.

It's important for the non-farmers to see that things are getting back to normal. The beekeepers are working and the bees are out.

You can see the hives. You can see the honey out at the markets and so forth.

USDA Ag Advisors have assisted the beekeepers in providing technical assistance, finding equipment that we can get into this country, providing information, and new technology, new methods to their producers.

I think that these are all huge steps forward.

Ryan Brewster, USDA AG Advisor, Diyala Province: One of the main challenges that we face in working with Iraqi farmers is the way they were used to agriculture. During the Saddam Regime it was a very Soviet style where the government provided inputs and then picked up products and paid them a government price. Since 2003, farmers have had to learn to produce on the global economy with Ag Economics and the cost of inputs, the cost of production and then the price that they received for their products. So that's a real change in the mind-set of these farmers but all the farmers that we've worked with, they are very enthusiastic, they are very willing to work and put in the extra effort to make that happen. And what we're doing is really providing technical expertise on how to write a business plan and where to find the best feed, different things like that and they're very excited to learn this stuff and they're hungry for new technology.

Crocker: PRTs in terms of agriculture do two important things.

First is work with provincial governments, but second, and this is really critical, is they're working with the people who make agriculture work and those are the farmers. Agricultural Advisors in the PRTs are reaching out to agricultural and farmer associations trying to help them get organized and then to ensure that the government at provincial level listens to the people who are actually growing the crops. It's all pretty exciting because it's part of an effort, an Iraqi effort, that we assist to basically make the farmers the center of agriculture in Iraq as they should be in any country.

Morin: In general there's progress being made, but specific areas that we're working in, I think that there's dramatic improvement, the initiation of a co-op for instance. Bringing that concept to them and showing them the value of a cooperative behavior in what used to be a very competitive one, it's working.

Logan Barbee, USDA AG Advisor, Babil Province: We work with programs incorporating the Iraqis and the planning and assessment process and their understanding and knowing about it rather than us just doing it for them, they have a buy in and then we follow through from there.

Tahseen Ali Mohammed, Iraqi Poultry Producer, Al-Anbar Province: They cooperate with our company and let us grow and grow and grow by their experience.

Dr. Richard Whitten, USDA Ag Advisor, Al-Anbar Province: What I see is his vision. He wants to be a very large, if not the largest, poultry operation in Iraq, I think. And my belief is that's what he wants, I will try to help him do that. I have expertise in poultry and I will share that with him.

Brewster: I work together with squadrons and they're out there everyday and they see the agricultural issues and they can bring me into the area as an agricultural expert and together we can work to help that community, help that area.

Lt. Nicholas Fiore, U.S. Army: The big thing is the lack of water and that's mostly due to a drought. It's real hard on the people there because guys are hard working farmers and with no water what are they supposed to do?

Dr. Greg Brooke, USDA Ag Advisor, Diyala Province: We were able to this year complete aerial spraying of the dates in Diyala Province which is the first time in three years. They've been able to go with helicopters and spray the dates which is going to be a tremendous benefit to this area because the dates are one of the biggest crops if not the biggest crop and also because the dates are a symbol for all of Iraq.

Crocker: USDA has been outstanding in stepping up to the challenge in Iraq, encouraging our most talented men and woman to step forward for these agricultural advisor assignments, but we need more. This reflects the centrality of agriculture to the economy in Iraq and to the society of Iraq. And it also reflects improving security conditions that allow our Ag advisors to be more active. We can get out, we can get more things done.

Carrigan: The main thing is that you feel like you've helped the Iraqis. This is not about us, it's about the Iraqis and as long as they appreciate the interaction we have with them that in and of itself is very important.

Huston: One nice thing about this culture is that they are tremendous hosts. You feel very at home, you feel very welcome, they are very generous people.

Whitten: I've enjoyed it because the people here are warm and straight forward and I like that. I don't know any other way to say it. I like it.

Brooke: One of my biggest thrills is to feel the genuine handshake of an Iraqi farmer or an Iraqi government official that they do appreciate something that you can do for them. Not everybody appreciates everything but it's kind of a warm and fuzzy feeling to feel that.

Conley: There are a lot of challenges here. I wouldn't sugarcoat it, but I really see it as doing good for the Iraqis but also doing something good for my country.

Crocker: So we look forward to continuing to welcome the finest agricultural advisors in the world to Iraq.