

THE MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM

WORKING FOR PEACE THROUGH COOPERATION



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Few are aware that despite the complicated political and security situation in the Middle East, a cross border program of cooperation in Agricultural Development has been taking place almost uninterrupted for the last several years, and now the great news is that a "Phase II" program is about to begin.

In 1999 an intergovernmental agreement for a Regional Agricultural Program was signed by Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority with Denmark as initiator and main supporter. It started with great optimism. Following the success of a trilateral program involving Denmark, Egypt, and Israel, it was suggested to expand the program to include Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. All agreed, and representatives of the prospective partners met in Alexandria to select subjects and objectives of common interest to all partners. MASHAV and CINADCO represented Israel.

Thus a full plan of activities was prepared on six main subjects: Small Ruminants, Low Cost Fodder, Dryland Agriculture, Saline Water, Post Harvest Technology and Marketing, and Women in Agriculture. The planned activities included national and regional surveys, demonstration farms, applied research, expert meetings, publication of manuals, development and introduction of computer programs (or translation of programs used in Israel), training, and more training.

To manage such an intricate, wide scope program, six task forces were appointed – one for each subject. Each task force was composed of four experts on the subject, one from each partner country. Leadership responsibilities were assigned for each subject. For example, Israel headed the Small Ruminants and Post-Harvest Technology, and Egypt headed Low Cost Fodder. Each task force's plans for the next months' activities were brought before the Steering Committee, composed of two permanent representatives from each partner, for approval. Each partner country had a national Coordinator, and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) appointed a resident – full time – Regional Coordinator, whose role turned out to be vital for the progress of the program.

From the program's inception, everything was done to make this a regional cooperative effort between equals for mutual benefit. Nonetheless, tensions and obstacles did arise, and then the function of the Regional Coordinator's office proved itself invaluable. When communication difficulties occurred, the Regional Office took care of it. When certain experts were unable to travel to a neighboring country for a meeting, the Regional Office arranged a meeting place in a third country often Cyprus or Italy, allowing the program to go on.

Once again it was proved that in areas of conflict the participation of an out-of-the-region donor partner contributes to the stability of cross border development work.

Incidentally, in a recent meeting under the auspices of OECD/DAC in Paris, the Middle-East Regional Agricultural Program was brought as an example of successful North-South-South cooperation. The forum was gathered to discuss possibilities of trilateral cooperation – that

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is – an OECD member donor assisting a “South” country to assist another “South” country. MASHAV has always favored such arrangements, which make it possible to offer more of Israel’s special development experience than it could do alone.

In recent months, the improved atmosphere in the Middle East was also in evidence in the last two meetings of the Steering Committee of the Regional Agricultural Program. Particularly constructive and intensive activity followed. Experts met almost every week either in Egypt, Jordan, or Israel. Three important training courses took place in Israel in the past two months with participants from Jordan, Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

In January all partners met in Jordan to prepare a proposal for a five year “Phase II” program. Two Danish representatives participated on behalf of DANIDA, Israel was represented by MASHAV and CINADCO, and Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority were represented by experts and officials of their ministries of Agriculture.

The new program for 2005 to 2010 will have the main components as in Phase I with some changes. The Saline Water component will include use of other kinds of marginal water. Aquaculture was added and Women in Agriculture will become part of all other relevant subjects. More emphasis will be given to transfer of know-how to the farmer through extension and training of trainers.

Phase II is to start in July 2005. Israelis and Palestinians, Egyptians and Jordanians, are looking forward together to a brighter future, one in which working together will help bring peace and prosperity to the people of the region. Cooperation under the regional program has made friends. It can also build peace.

Left: Participants and instructors during the course on Tillage Systems in Dryland Farming, Israel

Right: Demonstration of Ultrasound technology during the course on Small Ruminants Herd Management, Israel