USWDP AGRIBUSINESS BRIDGE PROGRAM

APPLIED AGRIBUSINESS SKILLS WORKSHOPS:
Agribusiness Training for Third Year Students at Kandahar University

Purdue University and USWDP continue to make progress toward establishing Agribusiness BS programs at five Afghan universities: Balkh, Kandahar, Khost, Kunduz, and Nangarhar universities. Dr. Kevin McNamara (Purdue), Dr. Don Breazeale (Purdue) and Mr. Hamid Faisal (Purdue) worked with the deans at each of the five universities to develop steering committees, conduct an agribusiness industry assessment, design staff training, and develop and implement the Bridge Program for students. The Bridge Program was initiated in the winter of 2015 with students at each of the participating institutions as a means of introducing agribusiness to the universities. The Bridge Program (similar to a minor in the U.S. higher education system) is a two-year program for undergraduate students in their third and fourth years. These students participate in intensive introductory agribusiness training—divided between lecture and practical application. Each of these workshops use a hands-on approach in which students:

1) Learn basic concepts related to economics, management, finance and other disciplines;
2) Practice applying these concepts to current issues and management decisions in agribusiness in Afghanistan; and
3) Develop educational and outreach materials for university faculty, students, consumers, and other agriculture business owners based on the knowledge gained in the workshops.

Importantly, while each workshop focuses on different commodities, the concepts, technical skills and management principles are readily applied across all agribusiness firms. The knowledge and technical skills the students learn are a direct reflection of the skills urgently needed in the Afghanistan economy, ensuring the students will have much greater opportunities to find meaningful employment upon completion of the program.
Overview:
Afghanistan’s economy relies heavily on agricultural growth; the agriculture sector offers more employment opportunities than any other sector and supplies a variety of food for domestic household consumption. The agriculture sector contributes 28% to national GDP and employs more than 59% of the population. World Bank (2014) reports that agriculture industry will continue to grow by 8% in the next ten years if the right policies are implemented to support the sector. Agriculture has the potential to create an additional 1.3 million full-time jobs in food processing, marketing, storage and transport over the next decade. As the agriculture sector continues to evolve with emerging new agriculture businesses in the domestic market, there is a dire need for agriculture professionals with managerial skills in farm management, post-harvest handling and agriculture business management. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry highlighted the lack of skilled graduates who can offer best management practices for local agriculture firms in agriculture market analysis and price determination and who have the ability to develop marketing materials (MoCI, 2016). The initial industry assessment done by the Purdue team in Afghanistan shows Afghan universities do not offer market-oriented degree programs in food technology or agribusiness management, two skill areas needed to meet the needs for job in Afghanistan’s agriculture sector (Faisal, McNamara, & Breazeale, 2016). Purdue University has partnered with five regional universities (Nangarhar, Kandahar, Balkh, Herat, Kunduz) to provide technical skills and support to establish bachelor degree programs in agribusiness management to fill the vacant gap in academic institutions. The Purdue-USWDP team has initiated the Agribusiness Bridge Training program to build capacity in the agriculture faculties to teach a new degree in agribusiness management.
Workshop Objectives:

The Purdue-USWDP Agribusiness Bridge Training Program was initiated in the Kandahar University Faculty of Agriculture (KUFA) to begin the process of developing faculties to teach agribusiness and Bridge Programs prepare students for the job market through developing marketable skills—a critical first step to establishing agribusiness programs in the 5 designated universities. The Bridge Program is designed to teach staff and students introductory skills in four academic areas: agribusiness management, economics, agricultural marketing, and computer decision making applications. The Bridge Program trainings serves three purposes. First, the program will strengthen the skills of staff who teach agribusiness. Second, the program will enable the Purdue-USWDP team to assess the participants’ skills and determine what support and development is needed to continue building capacity for a BS program in agribusiness. Third, the training will provide participating students training in agribusiness skills demanded in the Afghan job market—it will aid them in getting jobs upon graduation. Ten students were selected based on criteria set by Purdue-USWDP. Students possessing strong command of the English language, who were highly ranked in their respective departments and who were willing to learn new skills were nominated for the training. New skills in agribusiness will give agriculture students with a greater chance of employment in the private sector.

Workshop Activities:

Bridge Training in agribusiness was designed to teach management and analytical skills with hands-on activities applying them to in agribusiness management and decision making. Four instructors were taught in the program. Purdue-USWDP staff had already trained two faculty from Kandahar to lead the degree program in Agribusiness. Professor Mohammad Ismail Hashime, who specializes in agriculture marketing, taught a one-day morning session on the principles of agriculture marketing and covered basic concepts and economic principles of agricultural marketing. The session taught students to analyze consumers’ choice and understand market behaviors and factors that affect the market for agribusiness firms. Professor Sayed Mohammad Kabir, who specializes in teaching microeconomics and economics for
agribusiness, taught economics for agribusiness. He introduced basic economic principles to the students followed by discussion of how those concepts relate to good agribusiness management practices and decision making for business enterprises.

Hamid Faisal, USWDP Agribusiness Program Manager, led the computer application training component for six days of afternoon sessions. Hamid Faisal provided hands-on training in computer spreadsheet skills and functions to teach students the applied computer skills needed for effective management of agribusiness enterprises. Shershah Ameri, USWDP Senior Program Officer, led the first day’s session on introductory to agribusiness and presented students with an overview of agribusiness management and its application to agriculture enterprise management.

Workshop Outcomes:
A group of 3 students developed a market outline for the pomegranate crop and presented their work during class discussion. The students then formed groups of 3 to conduct a SWAT analysis of the business plan and share it with their classmates. This activity was designed to make students think critically about a market analysis for any product. Students were exposed to various agribusiness topics, providing them with sufficient skills to develop a business plan following the training.

The last day of the training program included a field trip for the 10 students to a local business to observe its operation and discuss how their newly acquired skills might be applied to the firm’s operations. The industry field trip exposed the students to a food processing company and gave them an overview of how they can relate those managerial skills learned during the first five days of the training. The industry tour also linked students with agribusiness industry and created connections for future internships and job opportunities. As result of the tour, one of the students in agriculture economics department was offered a part time job in a local poultry processing firm.

The pre-test and post-test results show that the training program has increased the level understanding from 47% to 77%.
Next Steps:
At the end of the workshop, students have been equipped with the decision making tools and skills needed to develop a market plan and business plan for a startup business in agriculture. Students have better idea of what factors affect supply and demand for the agriculture products. The group activities and project will give them an advantage for employment in a real working environment. Some local firms already have shown interest in hiring some of the trainees in the future.

References:

