



Iraqis Receive Agriculture Training in Texas

A 6-week agriculture training program aims to develop Iraqi agricultural methods.

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Courtesy Borlaug Institute/ Matt Stellbauer

Yousif Khalid Khdir, along with 12 other Iraqi agriculture personnel, visited the Poultry Center at Texas A&M University as part of a six-week agricultural training program. As part of the USDA-funded Iraq Agricultural Extension Revitalization project, Texas A&M University brought Iraqi agriculture personnel to Texas to introduce them to new agriculture technologies and methods that they can apply in their country.

The 13 Iraqis—10 from Iraq's Ministry of Agriculture, two from the University of Baghdad and one from the University of Babil—received six weeks of agricultural instruction in October and November at Texas AgriLife facilities throughout the Lone Star State.

The revitalization project, which began in 2007, is implemented through a consortium of U.S. land-grant universities spearheaded by Texas A&M in cooperation with Iraq's Ministry of Agriculture and Iraqi agricultural institutions. It is administered through the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture, located on the Texas A&M campus in College Station.

"The project is in its second phase, and now we're focusing on bringing small groups of Iraqis involved in agriculture to the U.S. to acquire new knowledge, skills and methods they can take back and share with others in their country," said Kate Whitney from the Borlaug Institute, who coordinated the training. "As part of our agreement, they have committed to share what they learn with others when they return to Iraq, so it's basically a train-the-trainer program."

The first week of training focused on extension methods and the 4-H youth development program.

"We wanted them to know about this program because so many Iraqi youth are involved in agriculture and because it will help them build their future," Whitney said. "4-H programs in the U.S. help us develop future leaders, and a program like this can do the same in Iraq."

The following weeks involved training in dairy, beef cattle and small ruminants as well as aquaculture and poultry. The group toured dairy operations in Central Texas, small ruminant operations in the San Angelo area and fish farms in Houston. At Texas A&M, they participated in hands-on activities at the university's poultry lab. The group worked with university faculty and staff to develop curriculum, course materials and training strategies they can employ on their return to Iraq.

"We're spending more time on training and education about small ruminants, especially sheep and goats, as these are very important to the Iraqis," Whitney said. She added that even though dairy and beef cattle operations are less prevalent in Iraq, she thought the training and tours relating to these agricultural sectors would be useful because they are working to develop those industries.

Sajeda Eidan, a researcher and lecturer at the College of Agriculture at the University of Baghdad, was primarily interested in sheep, goat and cattle reproduction.

"I want to improve my skills and learn more about how new technology can help me in my work," said Eidan, who has her doctorate in reproductive physiology. "I'm especially interested in how to use ultrasound to determine pregnancy in sheep and goats and in learning more about embryo transfer."

Eidan added that she was hoping to learn how to genetically improve sheep and enhance the quality of their wool. This year, the project will bring a total of 61 Iraqis from the agriculture ministry and agriculture universities to the U.S. to receive training.

"This type of project is key to providing food security, improving rural livelihoods, providing sustainable resource management and increasing economic development in Iraq," said Ed Price, director of the Borlaug Institute. "Efforts like these will help stabilize the country and provide greater overall security for the Iraqi people."

According to Price, the USDA initiated the project to provide agricultural extension training and support as well as expand



agriculture-university development and promote private-sector involvement in Iraqi agriculture.

“The goal is to help achieve sustainable economic improvement for farmers and others living in rural communities throughout Iraq,” he said.