



# M E D I A   R E L E A S E

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## **Tennessee National Guard unit helping Afghans raise bees**

**PAKTYA, Afghanistan** – The Tennessee Army National Guard’s 1-16th Agri-business Development Team has begun a new and unique mission in rugged Afghanistan -- helping the locals raise honey bees.

As part of the initiative, the Tennesseans are implementing a year-long project with the Paktya Beekeeping Association in the Paktya Province of Afghanistan to help raise 700 new bee colonies within the region and to educate new beekeepers.

The bee program is one of many the agricultural team is working on and is aimed at improving the region’s overall agriculture through pollination, while providing jobs for local citizens and helping vary the diet of the local population.

“Three decades of war and severe droughts in recent years have drastically reduced the number of bee colonies,” said Sgt. Robert Moore, the ADT project leader and Austin Peay State University agriculture professor. “This has had a negative impact on both the quantity of honey produced and the number of honey bee colonies.”

The Tennesseans are working to revitalize membership in the area beekeeping association, to improve the infrastructure, and to teach new association members how to maintain the program.

The ADT will offer new-member training and mentoring through the association, plus provide each member two bee colonies plus bee handling equipment. They plan to improve the association’s infrastructure by opening an association office in Gardez, providing initial operating expenses, developing bylaws and gaining legal recognition through Afghanistan’s Justice Department and Department of Agriculture.

They also hope to develop local producers of the wooden bee hives rather than relying on imported hives from Pakistan and other countries. “One of our projects will train 10 Afghans in hive body carpentry so they can not only produce the hives, but help provide trained labor to meet future hive needs,” Moore said.

Returning refugees, former beekeepers, and females will be the target groups for the new colonies. Moore explained that beekeeping is an acceptable occupation for females in the Afghan culture. By training females, they hope to have a positive impact on that segment of the population.

**(more)**

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## **Guardsmen helping Afghans 2-2-2**

Pollinating crops via increased honey bee colonies is of major importance. “Although several species of insects -- even mammals -- can serve as pollinators, honey bees are particularly important,” Moore said. “Apples are perhaps the best known crop requiring insect pollination. Afghanistan was a major exporter of apples, but since the decline of honey bees, they can’t even supply their own needs.”

A secondary goal of the program is the actual production of honey, which will benefit the region’s economy and vary the local diet.

“One colony of honey bees could easily add \$20 to \$40 to the annual income of a family,” Moore said. “For the typical family of seven to ten people, with an annual income of about \$700, beekeeping could make a significant contribution.”

The project should have positive, long-term effects on the region, Moore explained. “It’s going to help Afghan producers realize their goals of creating a sustainable and reliable agricultural infrastructure.”

### **CUTLINES:**

**Photo #1: Sgt. Robert Moore, the ADT project leader and Austin Peay State University agriculture professor, works with Assan, the Paktya Beekeeping Association Vice President, to evaluate the health of a bee colony at Forward Operating Base Gardez, Afghanistan.**

**Photo #2: Assan, the Paktya Beekeeping Association Vice President, assembles and inspects an active bee hive and assesses the health of the queen bee.**

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