Teaching Afghan Goat Producers How to Increase Incomes through Cashmere Hair Collection: A Hands-on Approach

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Abstract
In Afghanistan there are over two million nomadic people who raise large numbers of sheep and goats (Degen, 2004). According to Thomson, Chabot, and Wright (2003), nomadic people own over one-third of the seven million cashmere producing goats in Afghanistan. Shah (2009) stated, “90-95% of the Afghan goats are cashmere producing” (p. 17). USAID (2008) noted that cashmere collection is a lucrative industry in the country, an estimated 18 million USD in export of creasy cashmere. However, less than 30% of the country’s cashmere hair is collected. USAID (2008) also stated “the main reason for the low harvesting rate is the fact that the majority of Afghan farmers (estimated at 70%) are not aware of the value of cashmere” (p. 16); moreover farmers were not familiar with collection methods. USAID (2008) continued, if 90% of hair was collected, Afghanistan could produce almost 2000 Metric Tons per year, allowing Afghanistan to produce a larger share of the world’s production.

To address the loss of potential income, a hands-on train-the-trainer course was conducted for 33 participants from the local Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Land (MAIL) Extension staff, US Army Agricultural advisors, private sector farm store owners, and nomadic goat herders cashmere hair collection methods. Throughout the two day training multiple teaching methods were applied for the training; lecture, direct observation, question and answer session, and practical hands-on work helped facilitate classroom learning. The training offered the participants a chance to share different ideas and apply practical techniques for hair collection. Savoie (2006) noted that experiential-based learning activities enhance a participant’s ability to learn the content. At the completion of the training, participants were supplied with cashmere hair combs that were to be given to others they trained.

Two months following the completion of the train-the-trainer course, the original 33 participants were able to train over 300 nomadic goat producers in southern Afghanistan current methods of hair collection and provide them with the tools need for hair collection (VEGA, 2009). These producers were than empowered to take the knowledge back to their nomadic tribes and train other herders the hair collection methods. Based on this training activity more nomadic goat herders now have a profitable second income from their livestock; according to USAID (2008) cashmere was valued at 16 USD per kilogram in 2006. This second income may help herders...
solve some of the daily economic problems facing many Afghans. According to (Shah, 2009) nomadic herders are the most economically disadvantaged people in Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Cashmere Hair, Goats, Income Generation