Written by Joy Venhorst
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AMES, Iowa -- Terry Steinhart, Iowa State University Extension livestock specialist, recently spent a week at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF), Pakistan. He was a member of the U.S. team training Pakistan and Afghanistan extension workers. Steinhart said extension workers in the three countries share some similarities, such as degree of training and expertise in a subject matter and a desire to help farmers. However, there are many differences, and the U.S. model can contribute to strengthening the network and skills among Pakistan and Afghanistan extension workers.

“During training session introductions, an Afghan extension worker of 30 years said, ‘I love my farmers,’ which is a universal sentiment among extension specialists,” Steinhart said.

Steinhart was one of four U.S. extension trainers at the “Strengthening Extension Skills of Young Professionals in Afghanistan and Pakistan” workshop. Joining him were Louise Ferguson, University California-Davis; Trish Steinhilber, University of Maryland; and Kevin Murphy, Washington State University.

“Extension systems outside the U.S. Extension systems generally do not have an affiliation with their universities. Instead they are government employees, and thus they do not have an immediate connection to the applied research, as we do in the U.S.,” said Mary Holz-Clause, ISU Extension and Outreach associate vice president and project coordinator.

The June 2011 workshop was the first of three in-region workshops planned by the consortium of land-grant universities, which includes University of California, Davis, Washington State University, University of Maryland, Purdue University and Iowa State University, as part of the Af-Pak Trilateral, a project funded by a USDA Foreign Agricultural Service grant.

“Transportation is slow and limited in the two countries. They have no cell phones and limited funding. Extension workers have had no connection to each other or to a university and its research,” said Steinhart. “But they do have Internet access and are proficient using computers.”

This international training gave the 36 extension workers and university personnel their first

chance to meet, share experiences and begin building networks. During conference opening remarks, UAF Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Iqrar Ahmed Khan said the two countries are sides of the same coin, because they share values, religion and culture. They face common challenges of food security and terrorism, and he stressed the need to produce quality research and transmit the knowledge into goods and services. There is great need for strengthening the skills of extension workers.

During conference workshops, the U.S team created a general framework intended to support participants as they implement extension programming that incorporates technical knowledge. U.S. team lectures and demonstrations dealt with adult learning techniques, examples of programming such as workshops, field demonstrations and recruiting early adapters to run side-by-side plots, and development of fact sheets that are suited for the education level of the farmers. “While they are very familiar with Internet, they needed help identifying reliable information on the Internet and knowing how to search for information based on research,” Steinhart said. “They will be able to build on the training we provided through connections they made at the conference with university personnel and the other extension workers. Networking will be vital to their success.”

The second of three workshops planned for Ministry Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (Afghanistan) and the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (Pakistan) extension workers as part of the project is scheduled for September 2011.

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