

Greenhouses Provide Nutritious Meals for Senior Citizens and Children

In Yilanly, Turkmenistan, World War II veterans receive a pension of approximately \$15 a month. With such a low retirement income, many of the seniors can't afford to buy fruits and vegetables. Tomatoes cost \$2 a pound, and cucumbers \$1 a pound. Public schools also have limited resources and need help to provide nutritious school lunches for the children.

A U.S. Peace Corps volunteer, Allison James, helped the Veterans Center of Yilanly and Yilanly Elementary School #1 to raise the funds and build greenhouses, which can grow vegetables and improve the nutritional status of senior citizens and children in Yilanly. The elementary school has 900 children. James requested assistance from USAID's Farmer-to-Farmer Program to help the veterans and school staff learn how to grow vegetables in a greenhouse.



Winrock volunteers Zeb Jones and Nancy Walsh taught the Center's founder, Kasakbai Saburov, and other veterans how to grow greenhouse vegetables during the winter. They also worked with the Yilanly Elementary School to improve growing techniques, pest control, soil testing, and using organic fertilizers. The volunteers brought drip irrigation kits provided by Chapin Water Systems to provide an alternative method of fertilization and to conserve water, which is very limited in this region. As a follow-up, this year Winrock's Farmer-to-Farmer Program will work with the Elementary School to start a Future Farmers of Turkmenistan program, modeled after Future Farmers of America.

This past winter, 30 veterans and their families received cucumbers, carrots, and tomatoes from the greenhouse. The local government has offered to give the Veterans Center additional land and materials so they can build a larger greenhouse and feed even more veterans. The elementary school has grown tomatoes and spinach, which they use for school lunches and fundraising.

Jones and Walsh worked with a number of other farmers in Turkmenistan. "During both trips, we receive several requests from other individuals and groups for assistance to develop or design greenhouse crops and structures," said Jones. "With this interest in greenhouse cropping, a new industry can begin which will be able to supply more and more vegetables and fruits during the winter months that were previously not available. Requests for information concerning greenhouse structures, irrigation methods, and general extension services grew tremendously as we traveled around Turkmenistan." In addition to providing better nutrition for vulnerable populations, this demand for greenhouse information and inputs could also create new small businesses for greenhouse suppliers in the future.