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MEETINGS/TRAINING

Dear Reader,

The National Agricultural Policy Center (NAPC) has started a new era of self-dependence upon the termination of the Italian funded FAO Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA in 2008, relying on its own competencies and qualified technical staff formatted through the valuable technical and scientific cooperation acquired from the FAO Project.

The significant role of the NAPC and its professional outcomes has attracted the attention of several international institutions and expressed willingness to assist and cooperate with the Center in carrying out its work plan. In this context, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD) offered its kind support to fund the NAPC 2009 -2010 Work Plan.

Within the framework of promoting collaboration and expertise exchange with international organizations, particularly those working in the Country, the NAPC concluded a cooperation agreement with the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) aiming at benefiting from ICARDA' experts in supporting NAPC staff in conducting the following three studies:

- A comprehensive study on "Agricultural Risk Management and the Possibility of Establishing Risk-Warning Unit". The study depends on three secondary studies: rural finance institutions; institutions working in rural areas of syria and their role in development; and social security networks.
- A study on "The Economic Impact of Applying the International and Bilateral Trade Agreements on the Syrian Agricultural Sector"; and
- A study on "Analyzing the Impacts of Increased Prices of Agricultural Inputs/ Outputs in the World Market on the Supply and Demand of Certain Goods" and the government role in alleviating the resulted negative impacts.

Moreover, three collaboration agreements were signed between the NAPC and FAO to prepare the National Medium Term Priority Framework (NMTPF), formulate the National Program of Food Security (NPFS), and conduct a study on "Impact of Rising Food Prices on Farming Communities". These activities are intended to be accomplished by the end of the year.

With regard to 2008 Work Plan, the Center produced many outputs including the periodical report 'Syrian Agricultural Trade 2007' in addition to several studies, working papers and policy briefs. As well as the overall planned training courses and workshops were successfully organized.

We appreciate your comments and feedbacks.

http://www.napcsyr.org



NAPC and ICARDA sign the cooperation agreement



Launching Workshop of National Programme for Food Security

Agriculture-related Topics in the Preparations for Accession to the WTO

26 -28 October 2008

Under the patronage of Dr. Adel Safar, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, and in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the National Agricultural Policy Center organized the Regional Workshop at the Center's premises in Damascus during the period 26 -28 October 2008.

The Workshop aimed at strengthening national capacity of countries preparing to join to WTO. It targeted particularly the preparation process for the negotiations on agriculture and food security, in addition to promote the countries participation in multilateral trade negotiations. The participated countries were Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, Yemen, and Syria.

The presentations focused on recent developments in the Doha Round of WTO negotiations on the Agreement of Agriculture (AoA) reviewing the legal provisions, the commitments made by recently joined members, and clarify its potential impact on trade and agriculture. In addition, the Workshop discussed other conventions of the WTO related to the agricultural sector including Sanitary and phytosanitary SPS, Technical Barriers to Trade TBT,

Intellectual Property Rights and Genetic Origins TRIPS.

The Meeting also reviewed the experiences of the newly acceded WTO members from the Near East; Jordan and Saudi Arabia, as well as the preparatory procedures of other countries in the region such as Sudan and Syria. The training aspects of the Workshop considered the agricultural trade

anticipated effects of agreements relating to agriculture, to which the WTO members are committed such as Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary SPS, etc..;

3. Focusing on the applicatory and analytical sides of agricultural trade data and related analytical tools used in international trade in the forthcoming regional training workshops;



data and analytical tools adopted by international trade including WITS, ITC, FAOSTAT, and AMAD.

The Workshop recommendations emphasized on:

1. Addressing the developed countries and international organizations to assist countries preparing for WTO accession focusing on carrying out quantitative studies on the

4. In addition to NAPC, relying on other regional institutions to training nominated cadres for the preparation process and coordinating with Arab and international organizations to benefit from the Center capabilities in this field; and

5. Benefiting from the Syrian experience to establish national centers specialized in policy analysis in the region countries, and support the NAPC to be a regional center.



Participants to the Workshop comprised experts from the World Trade Organization WTO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations FAO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development UNCTAD, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development AOAD, the NAPC, and representatives from the fore cited countries.

for more details go to:

www.napcsyr.org/events/ws/reg/reg_ws_en.htm

Supply and Demand Prospects for the Major Syrian Agricultural Products



The FAO international consultant Dr. Carlo Cafiero accomplished the report of this study with the assistance of NAPC researchers namely: Samir Grad, Ahmad Sadiddin, Basima Atiya, and Haitham Al-Ashkar. The report relied on a series of working papers on supply and demand of agricultural products and agricultural commodity outlooks carried out by members of the Agro-Food Division of the NAPC. The expert presented the outcomes of these papers in a coherent and integrated manner, of which he concluded the mid-term prospects for production and export development of main Syrian agricultural products, and drew out relevant recommendations.

The report comprises six chapters: the first one briefly introduces the organization of the study and the international and domestic changes in food prices coincided with the study period.

Chapter (2) focuses on the evolution of agricultural production (supply) considering the main factors conditioning current and future agricultural production in Syria. They include environment, social and economic conditions, agricultural policies and market system. In addition, the Chapter highlights the current situation of main Syrian agricultural products wheat, cotton, barley, olive & olive oil, fruits, vegetables and spices, in particular cumin. It presents briefly a summary

depicting the overall structural changes of agricultural production at the national level detailed by governorates and climatic zones during the period 1985 -2006.

Chapter (3) is concerned with portraying the development of the demand for main groups of food products (cereals & legumes, vegetables, fruits, meat & eggs, milk & dairy products, and vegetal oils & fats) bearing in mind several factors affecting food consumption such as prices, total expenditure, food expenditure, and population. As well as, it analyses the current state of consumption, development of consumption patterns, and changes of expenditure patterns during 1982-2005 based on the result of household budget surveys conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Chapter (4) is dedicated to describe the mathematical programming model of the agricultural sector in Syria, which was developed to estimate the supply function of agricultural output and the derived demand function for agricultural inputs. The adopted model was applied on Al-Hassakeh governorate using two major crops (cotton and wheat) and an alternative crop (cumin) to obtain the following preliminary assessments: the impact of wheat price change on its output and water use; the impact of cotton price change on its output and water use; the impact of modernizing the irrigation systems on water use; and the impact of changing water cost on

the outputs of cotton and wheat. In addition, It assesses the impact of cumin, when included as alternative crop in the agricultural rotation, on water use. However, more efforts should be given to develop the model to include the impacts of potential risk factors of complying with the principles of market economy.

Chapter (5) clarifies the mid-term prospects of major agricultural commodities on both global and domestic levels relying on FAO, OECD and World Bank estimates and the determinants conditioning such prospects.

In the last Chapter (6), the expert draws conclusions on the status of Syrian agriculture as well as the future prospects. He assures that production of major crops will likely remain stable in the next few years, and only when the full incentives of market forces shall be activated, we will witness an adjustment in the prevailing cropping patterns through alternative crops and thus improving the economic efficiency of the agricultural sector.

Dr Cafiero stresses that due to population growth Syria will likely be still in need to steadily increase the agricultural production to cope up with its growing demand on food and modern processed foodstuffs. This precisely poses challenge to restructure the Syrian agro-food industry, and to promote the investment in this field to comply with the growing domestic and foreign demand on processed foodstuffs. Farm production, in turn, has to be improved to fulfill the new quality requirements of the food industry.

The key recommendation drawn out by the expert is that more attention should be devoted to farm income variability, agricultural risk management strategies in general, and to income risk in particular. *The full report is available at :*

www.napcsyr.org/pubs/studies/policy_studies.htm

Syrian Agricultural Trade 2007

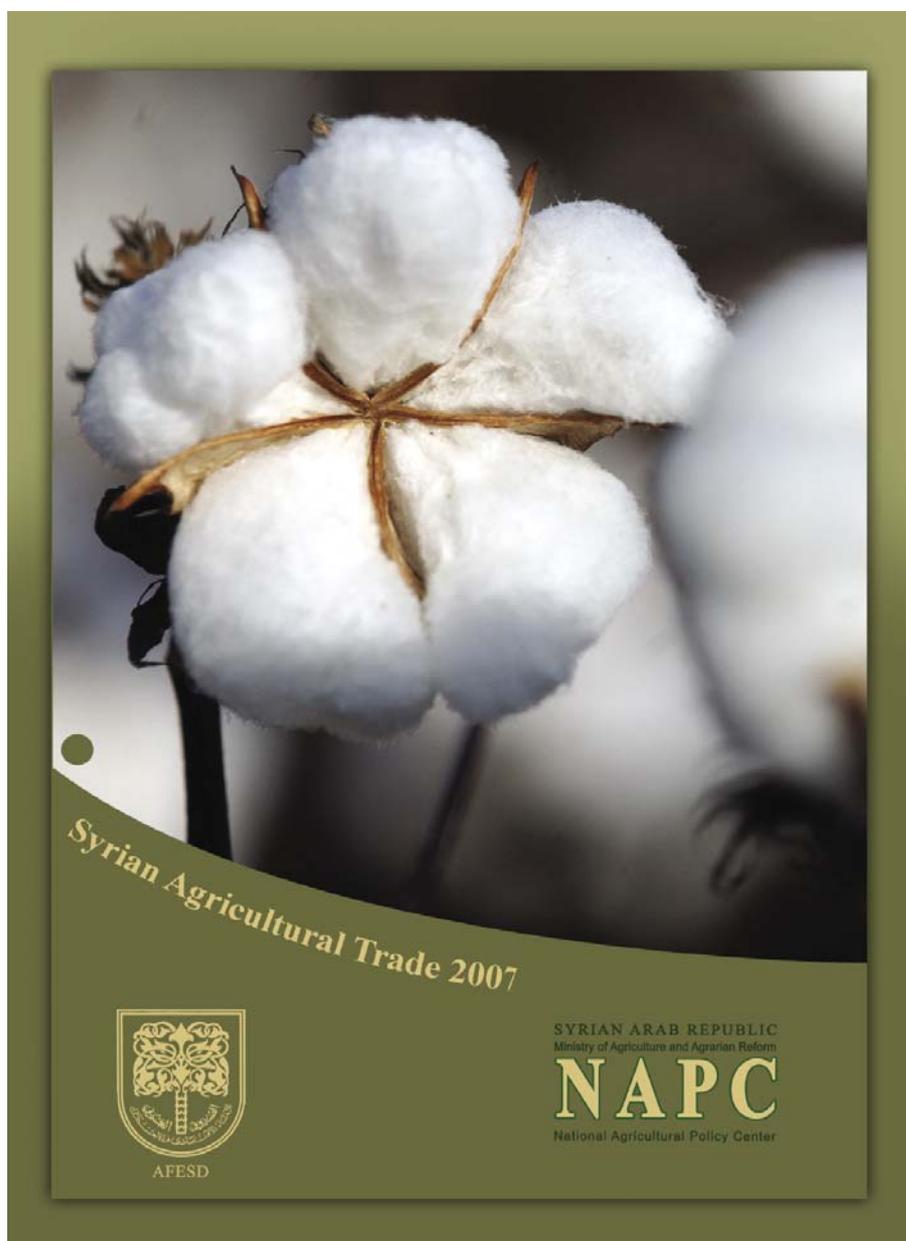
The sixth edition of the annual report *Syrian Agricultural Trade (SAT)*, which is one of the main periodical outcomes of the NAPC, has been recently published. It includes six basic chapters and a special one devoted to discuss bio-fuels issue.

Agricultural trade is of great importance to Syria, as it is one of the driven factors of Syrian economy, in addition to its role in obtaining foreign currency. It is considered a tool to achieve food security and to insure the population requirements of basic foodstuffs. The SAT report is an important resource for decision-makers and scholars which annually offers an in-depth overview of Syrian policies related to agricultural trade to help in drawing proper policies to contribute to the advancement of Syrian economy.

SAT 2007 reviews the status of the global and Syrian economy, and the impact of local and global policies on the development of economic performance in Syria. As well as, it presents the evolution of the global and Syrian trade focusing on the agricultural sector with exports and imports of the major products and agricultural trade balances with key partners. In addition, it traces the recent developments of global trade policies, agreements under the WTO, regional conventions, and agreements between Syria and other countries.

The SAT report also discusses the agricultural policies in developed and many developing countries, and the latest developments in the process of reforms of economy, trade and agriculture policies in Syria and the role of these policies in stimulating investment and macroeconomic stability providing analyzes for the most important macro-policies impacting the agricultural sector.

The special chapter is devoted to give an overview about biofuel production, and its impact on food commodities prices and hence on developing countries. Regarding the



global increase in oil prices, many countries in the world, including few Arab countries, has been allocating increasing areas for crops used for biofuels production as substitution for the fossil fuel.

The Report relies on analyzing trade data and characterization of the status of the Syrian trade identifying the challenges facing the restructuring process of the Syrian economy in the context of economic reform.

In comparison to global trade that increased by only 8.5% in 2006, the Syrian trade witnessed a remarkable

growth that reached 11.85% in the same year. Whereas, the Syrian exports growth exceeded 19% producing value share growth to GDP from 28.5% in 2005 to 29.6% in 2006. However, there was a relative decrease in the volume of agricultural trade rated 2.1% of the total trade. Noticeably, the share of agricultural exports in total trade declined from 20% in 2002 to 12% in 2006 due to the rapid growth of non-agricultural trade that derived from structural reforms and trade liberalization.

The full report is available at :
www.napcsyr.org/pubs/periodical/reports.htm

National Program for Food Security (NPFS)

Achieving food security is one of the prominent and enduring goals of the national strategies. In this respect, Syria has participated in most of the global conferences and workshops dealing with the topic of food security, notably the World Food Conference, held in Rome in 1996, which stressed on the need to halve the number of the world hungry people by 2015 and attaining food security.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has worked to assist the world states in achieving these goals by different ways, such as the Special Program for Food Security. The SPFS initially targeted limited numbers of small-scale farmers, showing them how to increase production and profits using low-cost technologies. Then, recently, FAO has started a new initiative by launching the National Program of Food Security NPFS as a country-driven solution to eradicate hunger within the local population. NPFS aims to reach the poor and undernourished with activities that enhance their productivity and incomes on a nationwide scale and hence to reach the national food security. FAO is committed to assisting States in the NPFS formulation process and resources mobilization to fund their proposed programs.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform dedicate great attention to strengthen the role of the agricultural sector in the national development plans, particularly, the achievement of food security at the household and the national level. In this context, the MAAR signed a cooperation agreement with the FAO to formulate the NPFS of Syria giving the authority to the NAPC to organize the formulation



process with the participation of national representatives from different relevant sectors.

The NPFS addresses the two key dimensions of food security, namely food availability and accessibility. As for the first dimension, the program will focus on the efficient use of resources in small farms through the control of water use (small-scale irrigation and water harvesting); crop intensification and soil fertility; diversification in the short-cycle animal production; and development of fish farms and aquaculture. Moreover, the program shall concentrate on post-harvest treatments; infrastructure and support services to agriculture (marketing - storage - rural finance - communications - agricultural roads); diversification of livelihoods; and development of rural industries.

As for the second dimension "access to food," due attention shall be given to most vulnerable segments (based on poverty estimates and available information in the country whenever possible) to explore relevant measures to improve their livelihood and detecting potential involvement of local safety nets to achieve this goal.

Concerning the formulation process of the NPFS, a Steering Committee set up under the leadership of the Deputy Minister

Dr. Nabi R Muhammad and membership of 13 representatives from relevant institutions. In addition, six technical task forces also were formed covering related sectors, with the cooperation of the State Planning Commission and the Central Bureau of Statistics to identify target areas and priority directions for the program.

The national formulation team will study the poor communities and vulnerable groups to propose appropriate projects to help raise the living standard of their population and attaining their food security. The NPFS shall then be submitted to the Syrian government for approval and to identify potential projects to be funded through the national budget, while the others to be proposed for getting the financial support at a conference for donor countries.

A workshop was organized in the MAAR in the occasion of launching the project and announcing the start of the NPFS formulation process in 24/2/2009. The workshop was attended by Chairman of the SC Dr. Nabi R Muhammad Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform and the FAO Representative in Syria Dr. Abdullah Taher Ben Yahia, members of the SC, and chairpersons and members of the task forces. The process of the NPFS formulation is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The National Medium-Term Priorities Framework (NMTPF)

NMTPF is a document prepared by the Syrian Government and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) over a medium-term collaboration containing a description of jointly agreed priorities in the field of agricultural and rural sector development, food security, and poverty reduction to help in achieving the WFS goals and the MDGs.

For the preparation to formulate the NMTPF and in collaboration with the FAO Syria, a multi-disciplinary national team was established involving

representatives of various relevant sectors, under the leadership of the Director of the NAPC Mr Atieh El Hindi, to determine country priorities of development projects. Then to be submitted to the FAO to secure financial support through technical cooperation projects or donor countries.

The national team comprises of representatives from: Ministry of Local Administration and Environment, Ministry of Irrigation, Ministry of Economy and Trade, the State Planning Commission, the General Commission for Scientific Agricultural Research, the General Authority for Environment, and representatives of different directorates of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The national team has already started the needed activities and preparations for the NMTPF formulation to be completed before the end of this year.

NAPC PUBLICATIONS

Syrian Standard Specifications in light of International Standards Requirements

The paper discusses the status of the Syrian legislations relating to goods standards in light of international legislations and standards requirements. The adaptation of domestic legislation with international standards is a prerequisite for countries wishing to accede to the WTO. The two mainly related to agriculture WTO agreements Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers on Trade (TBT) both allow the WTO members to set their own standards on scientific basis to ensure the minimum level of food safety and guarantee plant and animal health.

Issuance of commodity specifications at world trade level

was and still under the umbrella of major regulator institutions working on global standardization market, such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission, which is adopting the international system for food safety HACCP, and the International Organization for Standardization ISO.

The Syrian Arab Standards and Metrology Organization (SASMO) is responsible for developing the national standard specifications for goods and services of Syria. It is also gives the conformity sign and quality banner for the domestic products; grants conformity certification for Syrian exports, and controls devices and metering equipments. So far, it has issued

over 3000 specifications including definition of hygienic and technical requirements for commodities; ways of sampling, conformity process, packing, storage, analysis; and branding requirements.

There are other official institutions involved in monitoring the application of standard on products in local markets and of import and export. They also issue the needed instructions defining requirements and control strategy for products that do not have definite standards. They are the Ministry of Economy and Trade, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Industry, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Local Administration,

Ministry of Environment, General Directorate of Customs, and Commission of Atomic Energy.

Moreover, the paper discusses several proposals for adjusting Syrian standards to comply with the international one. Most notably, reducing the multiplicity of institutions responsible for issuing the Syrian standards, establishing a national commission to control exports and imports, modifying current food legislations, activating the role of information and databases centers and

networks. And adopting of international management and quality assurance systems, such as ISO and HACCAP; as well as qualifying local technical personnel working in the field of production, management and marketing.

This requires, therefore, establishment of developed centers for sorting, packing, covering and processing to benefit from the value added for manufactured goods coupled with promotion of Syrian processed products in foreign markets.

Within the support plan for quality infrastructure in Syria, a national laboratory for standards was established in 2008 after passing accreditation tests in accordance with the ISO 17025 of laboratory management.

The full brief prepared by Ms Khitam ALSomaia, trade policies division of the NAPC, is available at:

www.napcsyr.org/division_tpd.htm

Trade Facilitation and the Expected Impact on the Syrian and Arab Trade

The recently published NAPC paper introduces the definition of trade facilitation as the simplification of procedures and structured documents used in international trade. It covers trade procedures and official practices relating to collection, presentation and data processing of transition of goods involved in international trade. Trade facilitation has generated excellent benefits for developed countries, and it would be more distinctive and useful for developing countries in terms of freight costs and transit period.

The various benefits of trade facilitation are reflected on Syria, as other Arab countries, mainly by strengthening the competitiveness and trade exchange of Arab

economies provided that the level of commitments and costs should correspond with available financial and technical resources to enable for building capacities of these countries. This calls to increase cooperation and coordination among relevant international and regional organizations to provide technical assistance to Arab countries in this concern.

The proposals of the paper focus on free transit, fees, and procedures of export and import, in addition to other associated subjects of trade facilitation that coupled with abundance to customs rules which are the key issues of WTO negotiations. It also highlights the related up-to-date issues including facilitation of trade and security, single-window, paperless trade, and electronic documentation.

Moreover, the paper indicates the many obstacles facing trade in Arab countries such as high tariffs, security constraints, regional and border barriers, lack of institutional transparency, lack of coordinated systems for goods transition, and unclear standards of quality

for licensing procedures and requirements.

In this context, the paper demonstrates several proposals to facilitate and accelerate goods transition in Syria. They mainly emphasize on providing supportive facilities for customs clearance, coordination between actors of customs clearance to simplify current procedures, disseminating periodically economic and customs legislations, and involving the private and corporate sectors in ports services, shipping agencies, and modernization of national ports. Finally, it addresses to improve services of chambers of industry and commerce through circulation of legislations and decisions; enhance awareness about international conventions; as well as cooperate with international organizations and conduct studies on the current situation and future prospects for all sectors of the national economy.

The full brief prepared by Ms Huda Abbass, trade policies division of the NAPC, is available at:

www.napcsyr.org/division_tpd.htm

13th Scientific Committee Meeting

The final Scientific Committee (SC) Meeting took place at the NAPC premises on 21 – 22 December 2008. The SC was composed of two international members, Mr. H. De Haen and Mr. D. Romano, and two national members, Mr. M. Yassin and Mr. M. Khazma.

The SC discussed the NAPC Progress Report for the second half of 2008, and the quality assessment report of NAPC's outputs for 2008 in the context of Sustainability Monitoring System. In addition, it evaluated the recent activities in 2008 and the progress attained. The discussion covered also the studies planned to be held by the Work Plan for 2009 under the support of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD).



Training

Training Course for Palestinian Agronomists

Under the patronage of Dr. Adel Safar, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, and in collaboration with the General Union of Arab Agricultural Engineers and the Islamic Development Bank - Al Aksa Unit, the NAPC organized a training course for Palestinian agricultural engineers on the rural development during the period 15-19 / 12/2008 at the Center premises.

The main topics presented during the course: the role of strategic planning in achieving sustainable development; the most important areas of rural development including sustainable livelihoods, gender, and women empowerment; the role of development in achieving food security; natural resources management particularly land and water; rural development projects in Syria; and planning and evaluation of development projects.

Fifteen agricultural engineers from different Palestinian governorates of the West Bank working for the ministry of agriculture participated in the course.



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