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FACT SHEET

June 02, 2014

USAID Firms Project Dates Program

Geographic Focus	Khairpur & Sukkur Districts, Sindh
Implementing Partner	Chemonics International Inc.
Start Dates	March, 2012.

Introduction:

Dates are the third largest horticulture crop grown in Pakistan with an approximate annual production of 600,000 metric tons (MT). Pakistan is the fifth largest producer of Dates in the world, with a growing international market share of around six to eight percent. The contribution of the agriculture sector to Pakistan's GDP growth is 21 percent and the horticulture sub-sector makes up 12 percent of the share. One of the biggest clusters of Dates in Pakistan is Khairpur. There are 7,000 to 8,000 Date palm farms, six to eight Dates processing facilities and 110 Dates traders in Khairpur, Sindh alone. Women make up to 70 percent of the workforce in Dates processing industry. Total dates exports were a meager USD 80 million in the year 2012 with 164, 022 MT.



Dates are being dried on plastic tables provided by the USAID Firms Project

Sector Constraints:

Farm-level constraints: Improper post-harvest handling and lack of Date palm disease cure management by farmers, results in high pre and post harvest losses. Poor farming practices and use of wooden boxes for storage and transportation of dates to the market increase physical contamination and bacterial infestation. Lack of proper farm machinery and poor access to finance are also keeping the sector from realizing its full potential.

Processing-level and other constraints: There are poor management practices and limited know how among Dates processing SMEs. Workforce lacks basic skills in quality control and food safety measures. The full potential of Dates sector is not realized due to financial and operational constraints, coupled with poor market linkages with international buyers.

Interventions:

USAID Firms Project is assisting 45 Dates Palm farm SMEs and three dates processing SMEs in Sukkur and Khairpur districts of Sindh. The program objective is to Increase the economic value of project-assisted SMEs with improvement of on-farm and processing level infrastructure, to enhance cold storage capacity of the date processing SMEs, and skill enhancement activities that contribute in waste reduction and higher per acre yield with better quality fruit. USAID Firms Project also developed the international and local market linkages for the Dates processing SMEs to promote value-added products, while meeting international standards to boost their sales and exports. The key areas of intervention are:

a. **Technology and Infrastructure Upgrading:**

In-kind assistance is being provided to Dates processing SMEs and Date palm farm SMEs by USAID Firms Project, through a cost-sharing mechanism. All three Dates processing SMEs are being provided with cold stores (180 MT each) along with 60 KVA backup generators, food-grade X-ray scanning machines, hydraulic hand pallet trucks, and marketing / branding and packaging designs. All the 45 Date palm farm SMEs have been provided with standardized food-grade plastic crates (1000 each), plastic tables (500 each), water-proof plastic tarpaulin sheets (24 each), orchard boom sprayers (01 each), Solar Tunnel Dryers along with Solar System (01 each), Iron-made hand carts (04 each), aluminum ladders (01 each) and Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs).



b. **Workforce Development and Capacity Building:**

USAID Firms Project has conducted capacity building training programs of managers and workers of Dates farmers and processors to improve quality of Dates and reduce wastage. Furthermore, customized training programs were conducted on; Date palm farm management, Date palm disease cure management and Date palm nursery development. The Dates processing SMEs have been provided training on food safety management, export marketing, branding and packaging, business communication, quality management systems and production management.

Dates being processed according to international health and safety standards

c. **Standards and Certifications:**

The three Dates processing SMEs have obtained the following food quality certifications with the assistance of USAID Firms Project:

- Hazards Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) standards and certification
- ISO 22000 standards and certification
- Approval of Environmental management plan from the Environmental Protection Agency, Govt. of Sindh
- License of radiation facility for installation of X-ray machines from Pakistan Nuclear Regulatory Authority, Govt. of Pakistan

d. **International Market Linkages:**

USAID Firms Project has assisted the three Dates processing SMEs in creating international market linkages through participation in SIAL Canada 2014 trade fair to enhance their business outreach and increase their product's visibility in the Canadian and North American markets. The activity has so far resulted in exports of US\$ 61,000 worth of processed Dates by one of the three Dates processing SMEs.

e. **Partnerships and Cooperation:**

During the execution of our interventions, USAID Firms Project has actively sought advice, expertise and cooperation from the following organizations:

- Date Palm Research Institute, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Sindh
- Sindh Abadgar Foundation, Theiri, Khairpur, Sindh
- Sindh Dates Growers Association, Khairpur, Sindh

Results and Expected Impacts:

The project assisted SMEs are expected to achieve following results by December 2014:

- Increase in sales revenue of 45 farm and three processor SMEs by USD 0.9 million
- Increase in the export revenue of three processors SMEs by USD 0.35 million
- Creation of 70 direct jobs in the partner manufacturing units and over 200 in the ancillary sectors
- Provide employment for over 2,600 people including women.
- Develop cold storage facility to store up to 180 tons of fresh dates for each of three dates processing SMEs. This will enable these SMEs to supply fresh produce to local and international markets at higher prices during off-season as well.