

Fowl students cooped up in Paktya classrooms

Written by U.S. Army 1st Lt. Jason B. Bowers 1st Battalion, 45th ADT, 3rd BCT, 101st Airborne Division
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PATYKA PROVINCE, Afghanistan— There's a lot for would-be chicken farmers to consider in order to keep a budding poultry business from turning fowl or going to the birds.

The wrong answers to questions such as "what do these things eat?", "do I really have to clean that?" and "how'd that snake get in there?" have the potential to leave the farmer with plenty of egg on his face and none headed to market.

Luckily for a group of 72 Paktya youths, Soldiers from the Oklahoma National Guard's 1st Battalion, 45th Agribusiness Development Team recently sponsored a class to answer many of those questions.

The course, which the ADT supervises, was taught to male and female youth ages 10-16. The students were from the Gardez City area and were chosen for the program based on their socio-economic needs.

The comprehensive training program covered everything pertaining to the health and welfare of chickens, from physiology and diseases, to incubation and chick care. Toward the conclusion of the course, each student received chicken coops, 30 kilograms of feed, resource literature and perhaps best of all, 20 chickens.

"Based on the enthusiasm of the participants, it is apparent that this training was well-received," said U.S. Army Col. Mike Chase, commander of the ADT. "It will provide a sustainable source of nutrition and income through the production and sale of excess eggs and fowl."

According to the ADT, though many of the students had grown up around chickens, they learned many new methods of poultry management.

"I now know that a healthy chicken can live for much longer than what I am used to," said Shaikaba, a female teenager, and student in the course. "We didn't know how important it was to keep the coops clean."

"We were taught ways to keep eggs safe from predators," said Parwana, a young Afghan woman and graduating student. "We learned how to prevent the dogs and snakes from getting to the eggs."

One student, named Hailey, said that she learned about the proper mixture of salt, grains and

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straw in feed, and also learned things that apply to more than just poultry, such as how protein and carbohydrates are processed by animals.

When asked what other types of training they would like, virtually all of the students requested more extensive poultry training, as well as training on general livestock, carpentry, tailoring and cooking.

“I wish we could give them all the training they want,” said U.S. Army Lt. Col. Jackie Sanders officer-in-charge of the class, 1-45 ADT. “They are eager to learn.”

The students weren't the only ones to appreciate the ADT's assistance. “The ADT is doing a great job and helping us more every time,” said Niaz Lali Mohammed Zadran, Paktya's Director of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. “They have made several courses like this for the Paktya people, and it has had a very positive result in our society. Now most of the people are asking for more training, and we hope that with the help of ADT, we will be able to make every kind of course the people need.”

The ADT, along with the assistance of Zadran and the local contractor, kept a close eye on the training to ensure that it met the expected standards. It has, and the Gardez City program has been gauged a success.

According to the ADT, the program's success is due in part to dependable contractors, the professional staff at Shah Qambar High School who provided the facilities, and the overall good security environment in Gardez.

At the conclusion of the July 22 graduation ceremony, ADT members presented instructor certificates to the poultry teachers, notebooks and children's books to the school staff and festive necklaces to the class graduates.

The instructors then presented three ADT members with photo albums and daily planners.

“Programs like these are quick-win, and have a good turn-around time to completion,” Chase explained. “This builds trust in the ADT and trust in the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Most importantly, it helps Afghans through training. It provides employment, and all the resources used are produced and used locally.”