



SUCCESS STORY

Diwaniyah Increases Melon Production



Photo: USAID Inma Agribusiness Program

A local Diwaniyah melon grower stacks his crop in a truck to move to the market after a bountiful harvest in 2011.

The new high quality melons grown in Diwaniyah not only satisfy local demand, and replace imported melons from Iran, but also supply the lucrative markets of Southern Iraq, Basrah and Najaf, where demand far exceeds local production.

Melons are big in Diwaniyah governorate and getting bigger, thanks to the USAID-*Inma* Agribusiness Program.

The governorate is one of the major melon producing areas in the country where farmers plant more than an estimated 16,000 donums of melon annually. However, before 2010, only local varieties were grown there, which produced low yields – approximately 2.5 metric tons per donum. These yields were well below the international average of four metric tons per donum.

That same year, USAID-*Inma* conducted an analysis of melon production and concluded that high-yielding, high quality cantaloupe varieties could be grown, and potentially have a higher profitability than tomato, eggplant and cucumber.

USAID-*Inma* assisted four farmers to each plant 10 donum demonstration plots of four varieties of hybrid melons. Large, sweet, early maturing varieties were selected, which could hit the market 15 days before the later maturing local varieties. USAID-*Inma* also provided technical assistance in training the farmers on new growing techniques and methods to help boost production.

The new practices and varieties resulted in higher yields averaging 5 metric tons per donum, with fruits averaging 3 kilograms each, while local fruits average 1.3 kg each. Profitability for the demonstration plots averaged \$330 per donum compared to \$100 per donum for local varieties.

Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture recorded that 80 Diwaniyah farmers planted 700 donums of the new melon varieties in 2011. This is a twenty-fold increase over the 40 donum demonstration plots of 2010. USAID-*Inma* also facilitated connecting the seed supply company Hamza Al Tamim to international sources of hybrid melon seed, addressing one of the main constraints to quality melon production in Iraq.