

~~26 March 1999~~

To: Mark Pont, MCI/Quetta

From: Dick ^{Scott} Scott, MCI/Lashkar Gah

~~Subject: Watermelon and Cotton seed Distribution~~

After some delay because we were not informed of the arrival of the subject seed, we picked up the seed in Kandahar on 25 March 1999. I had a meeting today (eid) with Office Manager Habibullah and MCI Ag. Agent/Nad-i-Ali Nekzad on setting up a system for seed sales and distribution in Nad-i-Ali and Marja. I would have involved others in this meeting if others had been available. They were not. Planting time for watermelon is now and cotton is within two weeks. There is a rush. Planting season for any crop will not wait.

While not everyone will be happy with the focus on these two key areas for the seed distribution, they are the areas of primary focus, or should be, for project actions and poppy reduction. These seeds are an element in the poppy reduction program. To date, there has been no seed program for cash crops in these two areas although such programs were stated or implied in the meetings relating to the unsuccessful poppy reduction agreement. Thus, the focus for this seed distribution action. Agriculturally we need to get these areas' attention. So far we have not. We got their attention with the desilting program on the Boghra canal...now for agriculture and money. This amount of seed is a drop in the bucket when compared to what is needed but it is a start. The watermelons alone, at harvest, should get their attention.

I have instructed the two men above to call a meeting in Lashkar Gah immediately after eid of the MCI Ag. Agents from Marja, Nad-i-Ali and whoever is responsible for the areas of Basharan, Bolan and Aynak in Shamalan. I also asked them to invite the two Chief Watermasters from Nad-i-Ali and Marja (Mohd. Karim and Sar Malim) to the meeting. *This meeting should also include Eng. Payenda, Deputy.*

There should be a charge for the seed but not related to the original cost and shipment. This would be beyond consideration for most farmers. Side note: there is some similar watermelon seed on the local market (all with dates, out of date) at 3 million afs. per pound, considerably more than our costs plus shipment. Local cotton seed is provided free by the cotton gin.

The group meeting, including the local watermasters noted, will come to some conclusion on a reasonable charge for the seed. They were instructed to conclude a reasonable charge and not one that will give MCI a profit or to even break even. The goal is to get local attention of our new actions, not make money.

These areas are the center of local cotton production with farmers who know how to grow cotton. The cotton seed is limited. The farmers will have to be selected carefully and monitored to insure that the seed is planted in relatively isolated areas to keep the seed pure. This year will produce a better seed base for next year. And we will find out which variety of the three is the best for this region. A very careful record of who gets the seed and results will be kept by the MCI Ag. Agents.

An individual at the seed company was well aware of the conditions in Helmand and said that they had sent seeds in the past into this region. Perhaps for the FAO cotton initiative in the early 1990's. It is not likely that we will have received anything but well selected seed. Its looks, at least, are impressive.

Hopefully the pricing, farmer selection and distribution of the new seed should go well. The committee should keep in mind that 20 cans out of the 150 watermelon cans are hybrid, will be great producers this year but the seeds should not be saved for next year. The farmers should be reminded of this when it comes time to select variety.

Again, Nad-i-Ali and Marja are the primary focus of this development action. At least 90 percent of the seed should go to these areas. Upper Shamalan should be second, where distribution and results can be closely monitored. Shamalan is perhaps second in area production of cotton after Nad-i-Ali. It is also a likely area for the desilting project to expand into, assuming continued funding. Good luck.