

THE SECRETARY'S ROUNDTABLE

October 14, 2010 – 2:00 p.m.

Ambassador Kenneth Quinn – President, the World Food Prize Foundation

The Secretary's Roundtable is one of our traditional events. We're so grateful to the secretaries of agriculture for their willingness, in part of our partnership, to do this and to be here. And today we have a particularly interesting and very provocative group of ministers here to be able to talk about part of the world that's on the front page in America nearly every day. The three ministers, I'm going to introduce them now. They're each going to come up and speak, and then after that we'll have a Q&A session for the remainder of the time of this hour.

We're so very fortunate to have His Excellency Nazar Mohammad Gondal, the Minister for Food and Agriculture of Pakistan, with us. The first thing you need to know is — he's a farmer by occupation. First elected to the National Assembly in 1993 and again in 2008, he's held this portfolio since November of 2008, prior to which time he served as a federal minister for narcotics control. I used to work at the UN agencies on narcotics control, and we have to talk about that later. He had prior positions within his career, [which] included an appointment as parliamentary secretary for the Establishment Division, the administrative arm of the central government, and his election to lead a district in Pakistan.

Minister – His Excellency Mohammad Rahimi, the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Afghanistan — prior to holding this appointment, he was head of the national solidarity program in Afghanistan's Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development from 2005. He previously held several positions within the international organization, CARE, for more than a decade. And he was CARE U.S.A.'s manager of operations in Afghanistan and also CARE Canada's South Asia regional manager, and he has some stories to tell about dealing with the Taliban the same time that our Laureate, Catherine Bertini, was doing that as well. Now, one other thing you need to know — he has a degree from Kabul University, but he also completed post-graduate studies in management of development programs at Omaha University. So just like Kofi Annan, Minister, welcome to the Midwest. I hope it's your second home.

The Secretary's Roundtable is headed by Secretary Tom Vilsack. Those of us in Iowa know him very, very well. But for those of you who don't, let me explain that Secretary Vilsack studied law, married a young woman, Christie Vilsack, who's a terrific person and leader in her own right, and moved to the town of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. He was elected mayor there, then served in the state legislature and then ran for governor. And everyone had counted him out and he was down in the polls, and yet on election day he prevailed and was elected as Iowa's governor and reelected again. And I dare say, had he chosen to run, he would have been elected again and again, because he is held in such high regard and with such great respect by the people of Iowa.

We of course are thrilled that an Iowan would be made Secretary of Agriculture. I think you're the first one from Iowa, perhaps, since Henry Wallace. Isn't that right? There's a great tradition of Iowa Secretaries of Agriculture now reestablished. And we at the World Food Prize know him as a great friend and a great supporter. So I'm going to introduce now to you Secretary Vilsack. After he speaks, Minister Rahimi, Minister Gondal, and I'll come back up and we'll do some Q&As. Secretary Vilsack.

Thank you very much, thank you. Ambassador Quinn, thank you very much, and let me begin by thanking the Ruan family, John and his family, for the extraordinary leadership that they have provided to the World Food Prize. And let me also acknowledge that this has grown dramatically since John Ruan and Norman Borlaug first conceived of it, in large part because of the leadership and dedication of Ken Quinn. And, Ken, thank you for all that you have done for the World Food Prize and for bringing us here together. And I must say how pleased I am to be with my good friends from Pakistan and Afghanistan. We have a relationship that has been developed over the last year and a half, which I'll discuss in just a few minutes.

But let me simply say about Minister Gondal and Minister Rahimi – there is in my faith tradition this notion of turning swords into plowshares. These two gentlemen are committed to that concept. They both face interesting and unique challenges in their respective countries as it relates to agriculture, and they are both making a fundamental difference in the direction and in the history of their countries. And we are certainly privileged to have both of you with us today.

And I'm certainly pleased to have this opportunity to discuss briefly the work of our three nations that has started to ensure food security and to promote more productive agricultural economies in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. This trilateral partnership began in May of 2009 when President Obama invited the presidents of Pakistan and Afghanistan to Washington, DC, for what was then a historic trilateral meeting. That made two unusual things occur.

First, because of all three presidents' belief that peace and stability can be best promoted through an all-out government effort, the three leaders agreed that our government officials should form partnerships at many and distinct levels. And as a result, Afghanistan and Pakistan brought delegations that included cabinet members and ministers to Washington to discuss how we could best work together towards common goals.

The second thing that happened was that there was a unique and fundamental recognition that a conversation around agriculture needed to be front and center of any discussion. Folks agreed that a thriving and more productive and robust agricultural sector would serve as a foundation for a strong economy in Afghanistan and Pakistan and would allow us to work together to drive political and social stability.

But for this audience it probably goes without saying: a strong agricultural sector is indeed critical to the long-term success of any nation. Promoting sustainable development of the agricultural sector helps to create jobs and incomes, helps to have families prosper, ensures food stability, and provides a better quality of life for all of a nation's citizens.

This is particularly true for the nations that are highlighted today here, where so much of the workforce is involved in farming. More than 80% of the people who live in Afghanistan have their livelihood connected in one form or another to agriculture. In Pakistan a substantial percentage of their rural population, which represents two-thirds of their overall population, is also directly connected to agriculture.

So at our first meeting, which occurred last May, Ministers Rahimi and Gondal and I worked together to identify three key areas for increased agricultural productivity in their nations in this trilateral discussion. We wanted to work towards collaborative efforts, towards food security; we wanted to promote agricultural trade corridors between their two countries; and we wanted to look for ways to improve the availability of water for irrigation.

Since then, the cooperation between our governments, and some external participants from universities, nonprofits, and private organizations, has extended down into a technical level, with each nation creating a working group to focus on these priority issues. These groups have worked together over many months and have even come together twice in person. Their consultations have focused on finding concrete and creative strategies for long-term sustainability of the agricultural economies of both countries. The group focused on trade corridors [is] working to build on what will soon be an Afghanistan-Pakistan transit trade agreement,

which will allow goods to pass from one country to another. Most immediately, the group is developing and designing a curriculum of training courses focused on these export opportunities with specific pilot crops, like kinnow, a citrus similar to a tangerine, and grapes.

The teams also focused on food security as they looked at long-term plans to build the capacity for surveillance and detection of both animal and plant diseases. For example, an existing wheat-disease surveillance system in Pakistan has served as a starting point for us to strengthen and be brought across the border to Afghanistan. And the group is beginning to design a curriculum for extension workers on a wide variety of topics, including post-harvest handling, markets, seed handling, and rangeland management.

And the working groups have focused on irrigation; not only irrigation systems but also on rehabilitating watersheds to increase the overall availability of water for agriculture. The Afghanistan working group consulted for many months, and with Pakistani and American counterparts, to design an irrigation training institute which will be open to both Afghans and Pakistanis. And the team is nearing the final phase on design of four demonstration projects.

Finally, these meetings have worked towards finalizing detailed action plans for both nations, which recognize the differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan in terms of their needs and in terms of the priorities for their individual country's agricultural development.

While much of this work awaits final approval, I'm pleased to note the progress that has been made. These working groups are all well-positioned to move [on] program implementation this coming year. And the truth is, although these sorts of dialogues are never easy, nor are they often fast, there is incredible value in this collaborative process. To be truly successful in building long-term strategies that result in sustainable growth for agricultural sectors, strategic plans must have buy-in from all sides and recognize the unique requirements and needs of each nation. In the long run, this partnership can and should be judged not on whether or not we were able to strengthen the ministries that my colleagues run, but whether or not we've been able to impact and affect farmers at the ground level. But both nations must have agricultural institutions and ministries that farmers believe in and turn to for leadership and technical support.

It's really been a great honor and personal privilege for me the past 19 months to get to know and work with both of these gentlemen. And as we move forward with these strategic plans, we are committed to working closely to implement policies that will increase agricultural productivity and enhance food security so that we can strengthen the bonds between our peoples.

Now before I introduce these gentlemen for additional comments, let me finish by saying that this has not been an easy road for either one of these two gentlemen. There are many challenges within their respective countries. And in addition to a strong trilateral relationship, we also have been working on strong bilateral relationships, because the relationship between America and Afghanistan and America and Pakistan require individual attention. And we are committed as a country — and the President is very much committed — to both the bilateral and trilateral relationships.

I'm encouraged by the progress that I've seen. I'm excited about the opportunities that are created. I remember going to Afghanistan in January of this year, being at a juice factory and seeing the hope that was expressed on the faces of the Afghan farmers who knew full well that they not only were able to sell a crop grown this year but they had commitments for purchasing of crops in future years. That is what this is all about. And that is what the two gentlemen have been working hard to achieve in both of their countries. It is really and truly a distinct honor and privilege to have them in my home state, and I thank them for traveling great distances to be with us today. So with that, Minister Rahimi, the microphone is yours.

Secretary Vilsack, Ambassador Quinn, Minister Gondal, and honored guests, please let me thank you personally and on behalf of the government of Afghanistan for inviting me to participate in the 2010 Borlaug Dialogue International Symposium and the World Food Prize. It is appropriate that the world's most important meeting on food commemorates the agricultural scientist who saved the most human lives. Dr. Borlaug said, "The destiny of world civilization depends upon providing a decent standard of living for all mankind." He could have been speaking of South Asia, where Minister Gondal and I both live.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are more than just neighbors, and our lives are connected in many ways. Many of us speak the same languages or similar, share the same religion, eat the same food, and share the same customs. Today we both face serious problems with food insecurity. Pakistan through, its recent horrifying floods, that, hopefully, [only] temporary damage to the nation; and Afghanistan, due to the longer-term devastating effect of 30 years of war.

But we share practical advantages, old and new. Both nations understand the value of trade. Four thousand years ago our countries began trading in beets and gemstones. In modern times we have science on our side, areas in which Pakistan indeed excels. Building food security in both countries requires level of cooperation never seen before. So we are grateful to the American government for hosting the tripartite process, to hasten progress between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Our most recent meetings held in September in Istanbul made important progress in three major areas of food security, irrigation technology and agricultural trade. Our mutual problems of food security require better protection of livestock [against] animal diseases. This demands better livestock production and protection, animal-disease control, and establishing a quality-control system for animal vaccines in Afghanistan. Our countries also need better communication channels for significant trans-boundary diseases, improved capacity for disease detection and surveillance, and harmonizing standards for diagnostics. Extension and capacity building are other high priorities for crops production, in wheat and horticulture, and for food safety. Training programs were identified in a four-year extension/capacity-building program for the time being that will continue with short-term courses and working to improve inputs delivery.

Trade is, of course, a major opportunity for improved relations between our two nations. Afghanistan's ability to reach markets in Pakistan and India, and Pakistan's ability to trade in Afghanistan and Central Asia can potentially benefit both countries' economies and hundreds of millions of people. Our joint 1965 trade and transit agreement has never been adequately enforced, but we are impressed with the sincerity of Pakistan. The talks were invigorated by the tripartite process, and now the Afghanistan and Pakistan governments have formally approved the new treaty that will allow both countries to prosper.

Trade discussions in Istanbul were heavily focused on technical assistance, capacity development, and building mega-structures, such as processing plants and cold storage. These are essential for maintaining food security and affordable food prices. It is now important that we do not lose out on another trading season and that both countries speed up the finalization process and communicate its detail to its custom departments and other authorities. Afghanistan is the third-largest recipient of Pakistani exports, so this is important to Pakistan exporters and Afghanistan consumers alike. We also agreed on working together to build value chains for Afghan grapes and Pakistani kinnows, a delicious citrus fruit, reaching Afghanistan markets.

The ultimate value of the tripartite process will be determined by its implementation, of course. But all of the indicators so far are positive, and I am sure that His Excellency Minister Gondal agrees with me in thanking our mutual friends from America in facilitating these talks. I believe that Pakistan and Afghanistan are now on the right track towards better water management, mutual food security, trade, economic growth, and lasting peace.

Let me also briefly explain a few things about Afghanistan, and then we can go directly to Minister Gondal's remarks. Before most of us were born, Afghanistan agriculture sold cut flowers to Europe and the Middle East, and provided the world with 20% of its raisins. New varieties of crops were introduced, such as apples, and markets were expanding. Afghan agriculture was on the right track. But 30 years of war made our agricultural production drop by 3% a year. And from 2001 to 2007, drought caused the majority of our livestock to perish. War stopped our agriculture and research and extension services to farmers. An average farm is only one hectare, growing only \$500 of wheat a year. The war and drought stopped the non-farm economy and ended our off-farm jobs. Many Afghanistan farmers had to plant poppy or watch their children starve.

When our allies helped topple the Taliban government in 2001, the country was desperately poor but at peace. Then after 2001 we nearly wasted the next seven years in agricultural development. Donors commissioned their own agricultural work without consulting the government of Afghanistan for priorities and strategies. Money was spent on low-priority work for short-term results. Efforts were duplicated. The agricultural sector went largely unassisted and unimproved. Hungry young men from rural villages found that the only way to eat was to get paid to carry a gun or plant a roadside mine.

Since 2009, Afghanistan agriculture is finally improving. If we stay on course, within four years we can become stable in agriculture, and in 10 years we can become a reasonably prosperous country and an anchor for stability in the region. This is not science fiction, but it is science. In 2009-2010 Afghanistan came close to self-sufficiency in cereal crops. Agribusiness now sells concentrated juice to Canada and Australia, the Middle East and India. America imports Afghanistan raisins from a modern factory with its ISO-9000 certification. Our fresh fruits, dry fruits and nuts sell across our regulation. Afghan entrepreneurs have begun returning home from abroad to trade and invest. The sector is growing again. There are several reasons for these successes.

First, we are finally getting smarter and working as a team. The Afghan government is finally setting agriculture priorities, which we know the best, of course, while our partners provide the financing and technical expertise that only they can provide. The chaos seems to [be] over, and the help gets to the farmers and agribusinesses who need them.

Second, we finally have a good plan. We start with natural resources management, repairing or protecting the water and soil in agri-resources on which agriculture depends. This requires planting forests and providing rural electricity to reduce the need to burn wood. It means incentivizing local communities to take care of their natural resources and to share in the profits. It means rural roads for commercial access. It means more irrigation and better irrigation — key to agriculture. Today only 25% of our farmland is irrigated, and still half of that water is wasted. So we are beginning to improve existing irrigation work and build new ones, especially small check dams and reservoirs to catch the seasonal water from melted snow.

From natural resources, we turn to increasing farm production and productivity. This requires, of course, rebuilding our research and extension services in cereals, horticulture, and livestock. This speeds up the process of introducing lucrative new crops, such as saffron, and increasing the productivity of traditional crops, such as pomegranate. If a farmer learns to grow pomegranate using the most modern methods, he can quadruple his harvest and earn up to \$16,000 an hectare, perhaps five times that of poppy. It is similar for at least a dozen other legal crops. And we are beginning to import new technologies for dry-land farming, which can increase wheat harvest significantly. Productivity also demands farm credit, another area in which we are making progress. We are now building production by setting up a transparent one-stop shop for investors to lease government land that is now idle or misappropriated. Every year we plan to bring 25,000 more hectares onto the leasing market, and investors are interested.

Most importantly, we think and work [on] value chain building through products, [a] product line from the field to the market, the factory and the airport. In agriculture we find that building synergies is as important as solving individual problems. That is our basic strategy for agriculture, food security, jobs and peace. If you have any question, I will try to answer them as I can. Thank you very much for your attention.

H.E. Nazar Gondal – Minister of Agriculture, Republic of Pakistan

Bismillab ar-rahman al-rahim. Your Excellency, Secretary Vilsack, Minister Rahimi, Ambassador Quinn, scientists and farmers, ladies and gentlemen. I feel honored this morning to be a part of this wonderful gathering at the Norman Borlaug International Symposium in Des Moines. I am grateful to Secretary Vilsack and Ambassador Quinn for extending this invitation to me, which offers an excellent platform for all of us to discuss the global challenges being faced in the area of food security and safety.

The name of this year's symposium, *Take it to the farmer*, is not only timely but is very close to my heart. It was relevant yesterday, it is relevant today, and it will remain relevant tomorrow.

Agriculture is the backbone of Pakistan's economy and has a major share in economic development, in the substantial and sustained growth in the sector; therefore it always remains a subject of priority in Pakistan, agriculture policy. Unfortunately, with the ever-increasing population, the demand for food and feed for both human beings and livestock have also gone sky-high with the land and water resources remaining more or less constant. This has increased rural poverty and widened the gap between the rich and the poor. I am confident that this year's topic for the symposium will go a long way in identifying the ways and means to effectively reach out [to] the many kinds of rural economies.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you are aware – and Rahimi, always kind to us, discussed this issue – Pakistan was recently hit by severe flood, causing the deaths of more than 1900 persons, destroying crops on an area of 2.36 million hectares, leaving more than 1.9 million families homeless and killing more than 1.2 million domestic animals. At this point, I am grateful to the help provided by the U.S. government, for the relief and rescue operation is highly appreciated. The rehabilitation of the agriculture sector is in fact a bigger challenge to face now.

The revival of agricultural activities is essential, as it is the only way to bring the rural population into income generation and subsequent asset-formation. We in Pakistan are excited in the new trilateral and bilateral cooperation and expect [the development of] new technologies for enhancing productivity. We are working together to produce new high-yielding varieties of wheat, cotton, rice and maize. We need to work more closely to address the issues of crop and animal health, which are key to economic stability and food security.

We are also committed to working with Afghanistan; the trilateral consultation and its secretariat has opened up new resources and opportunities. We had two very successful meeting in Doha and recently in Istanbul, which enabled us to identify areas of cooperation in food security, water management, and inter-development. The recently concluded law on trade [between] Pakistan and Afghanistan will go a long way to bringing the two countries much closer.

Lastly, I will again be thankful to Secretary Vilsack that he is our leader in this trilateral dialogue, and we are getting and seeking the guideline for the new technology and for the better assistance. Again, thank you very much for all.

Kenneth Quinn

Mr. Secretary, ministers, thank you for your remarks, and now time to engage the audience. If you have questions that you want to pose to our group of ministers, come up to the microphone and make yourself... we have some time for questions and have a dialog. Please, first, go right ahead. Identify yourself, please.

Question

Yes, thank you, and, gentlemen, thank you so much. My name is Jo Turner. I work with the 4-H program, which is a 100-year-old organization — Secretary Vilsack, it belongs to you, as a part of USDA — that's been preparing young people for agricultural and civic leadership. And I guess my question is, as we think about

the farmer who has to feed the world in 20 years, it's most likely that person is a 12-year-old boy or girl in one of our countries. And I would like to know, as you think about capacity building and developing these strategies for the future, what are you thinking about preparing the 12-year-olds, the 15-year-olds, and often the 12-year-old girls – because we know the important role that women play in food production around the world – how are you working to ensure that those young people are ready to feed the world?

Tom Vilsack

Let me start by indicating to you what we did yesterday morning. We had an opportunity to visit the McKinney farm just outside of Colo, Iowa, and it was an opportunity for both ministers to essentially see a crop farm operation in Iowa. But most importantly, they had the chance to visit with Iowa State University officials about extension and basically were introduced to Jack and Sam McKinney, who were both 4-H'ers. These are young fellows who are working on the farm for their dad – for their dad and with their dad, getting that first early experience in farming.

And we talked briefly about the opportunities that a 4-H type program could have in either one or both of these countries, as an extension of Extension or as something that the government by itself would be able to operate. So they had a chance to see, briefly, four generations of Iowa farmers and farmers-to-be, as a way of introducing that subject. But I'd be happy to turn it over to either one of these two gentlemen in terms of young people.

Kenneth Quinn

You both have a microphone; it should be right down next to you on the table.

Mohammad Rahimi

I think the question was to you.

Tom Vilsack

I think they were interested. I think that America faces a very unique challenge with reference to farming, and that is that our farmers are aging rather rapidly, and we've seen a shrinkage in the number of people participating in farming, until recently. We have seen an increased number of farmers in just the last three or four years, very small farming operations getting started and being linked to local consumers more effectively through our Know Your Farmer – Know Your Food program. So I'm confident that we'll be able to do a better job of encouraging young people to participate.

I think as I look at the challenges in Afghanistan and Pakistan, I think it is important, very important, for them to get their universities more heavily engaged and involved in their activities to grow agriculture in their respective countries. And I think that's one of the reasons why we had a chance to meet with Iowa State officials yesterday, to educate them a little bit more about how extension works in this country and how they might be able to take that model, modify it to meet their purposes in their respective countries.

Mohammad Rahimi

I think the issue of involving universities that Secretary mentioned is very, quite helpful in my country. Unfortunately, universities are very much separated from the production or [work] involved from the field and from the farm, and even partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture — I think this is something we have to overcome. And I was very proud to see that, at Purdue University, 10 Afghan master-degree students were there, and in a few months' time they [will be] ready to go back and work for three universities in Afghanistan — Kabul, Nangarhar, and Herat. And part of what they have been encouraged [to do], not only

to teach but also to have a partnership, to create a partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture [through] research and extension and to start investing their time and energy also through the ministry as well as through their faculties and universities — very important.

Nazar Gondal

As long as my country's concerned, as so many people know, we have an agro-based economy in Pakistan, and we have a very good institution in agriculture. We have very good research institute. We have very good infrastructure for agriculture, and we have a strong link between agricultural extension and the scientists and the doctors of the agriculture. And we have a very good source of capacity building of the farmers. That is why we are very much confident in agriculture growth, particularly in wheat. You know, wheat is our staple food. We were deficit in food 2-3 years back, but after the democratic government come, we are self-sufficient in food and wheat, and we are in a position to export the food products to Afghanistan and any other country. Thank you.

Kenneth Quinn

I'm from Iowa, so I'm always giving advertisements for Iowa. And of course 4-H, we believe, was started in Iowa by Jessie Field Shambaugh, one of our heroes, in 1906. There may be a few people from Ohio here who have a false claim on this. But, ministers, we have very young people in 4-H, and then we also have FFA, used to be called Future Farmers of America. And there's going to be about 50,000 of them next month in Indianapolis for a big convention. Is there anything like that in Afghanistan or Pakistan to give younger kids, 10 or 12 [years old], into clubs or get them oriented into farming?

Mohammad Rahimi

I think this is probably a very high priority for United States. We have probably the same size of farmers, 2.5 million to 3 million farmers, but the difference is in America it constitutes 1% of the population. But in Afghanistan it constitutes 80% of the population. So I have to focus on my priorities and the priorities to increase production and productivity, increase efficiency of irrigation systems, which is the key, providing agricultural farm credit to farmers. Until three months ago Afghanistan did not have a credit system focused on farming communities. And you can imagine how much the agricultural sector was unassisted and forgotten. And I've very pleased that now, I think I'm hearing that's an international trend, that agriculture is coming back to the international stream. I think this will immensely positively on our situation as well.

Nazar Gondal

[Before I came here], it was in my mind that the food is the most important thing in the world for the human being and for the animals, livestock. But here I come to know and I understand and it is my feeling that food is important, but the agriculture is more important than the food, because the agriculture is the basis to provide the food for the human beings. So I am getting the message from the symposium that the agriculture is the most important sector for the human life. This is a unique thing, and this is a very good idea which I am getting to my country.

Tom Vilsack

If I can add to that, one of the changes that I think has taken place in the last year and a half — President Obama has been very clear about his view of our relationship with countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan; that, in the past, when we had the tragedy as you alluded to, the extraordinary flood and the devastation, America's response would obviously be to provide emergency assistance and to provide food assistance. But oftentimes that's pretty much all we did. And what we now, I think, have is an understanding of our need to

use our technical capacities, our expertise, our knowledge, and to share that, but to share it in the context of what the country has decided for itself is important.

So, for example, in our relationship with Afghanistan, Minister Rahimi has put forward his vision for agriculture in Afghanistan, and we are trying to match up our resources at his request. So we have people working in his ministry to establish a stronger ministry. We have folks working on the ground, in provinces, to encourage farmers to take a look at those alternative crops that he referred to. We have experts in irrigation working on small- and large-scale irrigation programs. And I think one of the reasons we feel good about what's happening in Afghanistan is there is this connection to a plan. And we're working in Pakistan in the same way, and we talked about the possibility of greater relationships in terms of research and development and greater opportunities for our researchers and for Pakistani researchers to come to the United States. So it's a different approach, and I think it holds for us a much better outcome in terms of food security.

Kenneth Quinn

Do we have another question in the back?

Question

Assalom-u aleykum, Minister Gondal and Minister Rahimi, welcome to the heartland of America. My name is Jim Hershey. I'm with the American Soybean Association's World Initiative for Soy and Human Health. And thank you very much for coming such a long way to what some of us call the "soybean belt." But, Secretary Vilsack, the USDA has as a mandate, as some of its many mandates, to support agricultural production and the population's nutrition. And perhaps you could remind us of some of those programs, but I also wonder if the ministers have the same types of mandates for both agriculture and nutrition in their respective ministries.

Nazar Gondal

First off, I am grateful and thankful for the soybean diet, very good food. And secondly, as long as the question is concerned, luckily we are doing this job regarding the nutrition and the food. We have a project, and we have started from schools, with the collaboration of our Health Department and Health Ministry. And again I appreciate the role of FAO. FAO is also helping us in this nutrition system, nutrition purveyance to the people of Pakistan. And we have started it from public school, then to high school, from the rural areas in Pakistan, all over the country almost. Thank you.

Mohammad Rahimi

Of course, definitely, the answer is yes. We are concerned about production, but also we are concerned about food security, which means distribution and nutrition in the whole chain – to the family and to the children. But of course there are also responsibilities and mandates for the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Rural Development and Ministry of Women's Affairs and a number of others, of United Nations organizations. But the key is that we work as a team. There is a cluster of agriculture and rural development that I am leading in Afghanistan; that four ministries, plus others occasionally, work in the cabinet structure — it's the ministry of agriculture, ministry of rural development, ministry of counter-narcotics, and ministry of water and energy — together to ensure food production, availability, and access of families to food, plus of course an overall agenda of economic growth in the country.

Tom Vilsack

The job of the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture is one that's not necessarily fully appreciated by everyone in our country. But we do have a significant role to play in nutrition which is often not understood or appreciated. Roughly two-thirds of our budget is in the form of nutrition assistance. In one part, we basically provide assistance to families to be able to afford to go out and buy a few more groceries for their family to make sure that, when they're going through difficult times, that they can put food on the table for their families. The other part has to do with making sure that our youngsters at school have access to school breakfast and school lunch.

And we have an interesting challenge in this country, and that we have still today in the United States of America 17 million children who live in food-insecure homes, which are homes in which they may not get all of the nutrition during the month that they need. At the same time, unfortunately, a growing number of our youngsters are dealing with obesity. In fact, there's some indication that, perhaps, as many as a third of the children in America are either obese or at risk of being obese. So it is part of our responsibility, as we provide support for school lunch and school breakfast, to try to see if we can improve those programs to include more fruits and vegetables, more whole grains, more low-fat dairy, less processed food that might contain too much sugar or sodium or fat.

And when I was in Afghanistan, Minister Rahimi and I talked about the possibility of creating and having the Afghanistan government consider the possibility of snacks or some kind of food assistance that might be, at some point in time, a very important component of his vision area. But it's been obviously an important part of our vision since 1946 when the school-lunch program was established.

Kenneth Quinn

And the question back here.

Question

Good afternoon. My name is Dana Peterson. I'm with the National Association of Wheat Growers. Both of the ministers mentioned wheat in their presentations, and I know that we are, all three nations are, looking at the threat of Ug99 to the wheat crop. And I wondered if you might take this opportunity to share with us some of the research efforts that are happening in your countries to attack this disease that's attacking our crop.

Kenneth Quinn

Dana is [from] a sixth-generation farm family from Kansas — right, Dana? — in growing wheat.

Nazar Gondal

Yes, we are very much aware of this Ug99, and we have a system to checking this disease from all of our borders. We have a system we have fixed in our borders. And it is expectation that it will come through Iran, and we are watching those borders. Our scientists are working on that, and we are very much cautious regarding this Ug99. I think, *inshallah*, we will protect our crops from this disease.

Mohammed Rahimi

It's amazing the Ug99 has stopped in Iran, has not entered into Afghanistan. We often think that probably even Ug99 is afraid of Taliban and does not come. But we have set some traps and to monitor and

surveillance the situation, and we are working with USDA and CGIAR institutions to develop Ug99-resistant seeds – and already started, actually, distribution to the farmers to protect our farms. Yes, it's very important.

Tom Vilsack

A couple of things. One of the opportunities that we've created in Pakistan, through our bilateral relationship, is a commitment of resources in a variety of areas that the Pakistanis have identified they are in need of help. And approximately \$20 million a year has been allocated towards this effort. We are obviously hopeful that we will be able to continue that commitment in addition to providing the assistance the country needs to withstand the devastation of the flood. Part of that \$20 million a year is allocated towards additional surveillance and assistance in this particular area, so we are very, very cognizant of the need to continue to be vigilant in that part of the country, in that part of the world. At the same time, we want to continue to do research here in this country, which we will continue to do, and hopefully we'll be able to expand and do a better job of in the future.

I might also say that – this is an interesting discussion – I was taking a tour of George Washington, our first president's home, in Mt. Vernon. And he was a fairly lucrative and profitable farmer in his day. And as I was touring his farm fields, the folks who were tending his fields suggested that they were having an issue with wheat rust in their fields in Virginia, and that as a result of that, we're now doing some experimental work with that farm field in an effort to try to learn more about how we can prevent this.

And then finally, this question raises the awareness that we all must have of pests and diseases, invasive species and so forth, in terms of its impact, because we are in a global economy. We are in a society where goods and services pass from border to border, and with that come many challenges. So at USDA, one of our concerns is making sure that we allocate sufficient resources to the wide variety of diseases that either need to be contained or solved, so that our crops and the world's crops are not damaged any more than they already are.

Nazar Gondal

I want to add something, that in our Pakistan Agricultural Research Center, there are some varieties, particularly there are UG99-resistant varieties, and we have allocated a special fund for those, and we are working on it. And as I have said before, we are very much conscious regarding this UG99. Thank you.

Kenneth Quinn

One more question back there.

Question

Yes. Thank you to Mr. Secretary Vilsack and the foreign ministers and Ambassador Quinn. My question revolves around foreign policy. Could you please explain to us exactly what you are doing to help combat the amount of poppies or even in other countries, such as coca plants or things like that, and converting that land to more, shall we say, productive uses such as wheat, rice, etc.?

Tom Vilsack

One of the great challenges that Minister Rahimi has in particular in Afghanistan is the need to convince his farmers of the fact that there are cash crops and staple crops that might be more profitable to them.

What the Afghan farmers are doing in growing poppy is quite rational. In many cases, the cost of inputting the crop is advanced, so there's very little risk in terms of financial commitments when the crop is put in the

ground. When it's ready to be harvested, oftentimes it's picked up at the farm gate, so there's no post-harvest loss issues, there's no storage requirement, there's no transportation risk. And the value of the crop is, relative to other crops – wheat, for example – is significantly higher. So, very little risk and pretty significant reward.

But along comes Minister Rahimi with proof and data that suggests that if that same farmer were to be committed to pomegranates or almonds or saffron or table grapes, that the reward might be substantially higher – in fact, in some cases, four or five, six times what a hectare of poppy might bring.

So the challenge that he's working on, [and] that we're trying to help is — how do you create a system that reduces the risk for that farmer who's willing to take a chance with those cash or staple crops? How do you create the credit system that didn't exist until recently? How do you ensure that there is a reduction in post-harvest loss and storage facilities both on the farm and regionally? How do you create markets, both domestically and foreign markets, that make it easier for that crop to be sold? And how do you set up systems where farmers can get a predictable and stable price for what they grow? This is the challenge that he faces, and progress is being made, and I think he can share with you the extent of progress in just the last couple of years.

Mohammad Rahimi

I want to share with you some of the statistics here, which is very interesting. In 2007 the area covered by poppy in Afghanistan was 193,000 hectares, producing 8,200 metric tons of poppy. In 2008 this was dropped to 157,000 hectares, which produced 7,400 metric tons of poppy. In 2009 this has dropped to 123,000 [hectares], which produced 6,900 tons. But in 2010 the total production prediction is 3,600 tons, so there's a big drop of 48% in the production of poppy in the country. So the number of hectares has not been reported yet.

There is a number of other interesting information. If a farmer in 2009 got from one hectare of poppy an income of \$3,590, while in the same year, 2009, a farmer got up to \$25,000 from saffron, and \$15,900 from pomegranate, and \$12,000 from black caraway, and \$7,840 from almond, and \$6,000 from a hectare of grapes – but then the question is, why poppy, if there is this much difference?

The answer is easy: because poppy has a big market, and there is off-farm advance money paid by smugglers, often foreign smugglers, to the farmers. There is no risk. They get it off the house or farm, pay the money in advance, so there is credit, there is extension services for it, very, very highly technical, and there is a market. So if the farmer knows that their grapes will go to Pakistan and sold in Lahore without any stopping at the border, customs or police — they will never grow poppy, because there is law enforcement; there is a risk that they're going to lose everything. Or the same will be for Pakistan, if their farmers would be able to sell their kinnows to Central Asia or Afghanistan, they're going to be increasing that production.

So now, as I said in my remarks, there are components now falling into place now. We will have credit, we will have extension and research, we will have improved our markets through the new Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement, so that farmers in our region will have easier access to each other's markets.

Nazar Gondal

At one time we were facing also this problem. We were also a poppy-growing country, but with the grace of God we established a Ministry of Narcotics Control, first; second, we had a force, an anti-narcotics force headed by army generals; and third, we had the “Three-D” policy — dialogue, deterrents and development, maybe with the poppy growers, maybe with the extremist. We dialogued with the growers, we convinced them; and if they didn't agree with us, then there were the deterrents; and after that was the development. And I can say here that no Pakistan is a poppy-free country, with the grace of God. Thank you.

Kenneth Quinn

Thank you. Wow! Mr. Secretary, Minister Rahimi, Minister Gondal, thank you so very much for a very engaging hour. And you've just made World Food Prize history, because this was the first session ever webcast, so it was available all around the world, and we're glad to have you as part of our legacy. Thank you again so very much.