

24 DECEMBER 2001

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SUBJECT: HELMAND COTTON AND OTHER CASH CROPS

COTTON IN HELMAND IS THE LOGICAL CASH CROP AND REPLACEMENT FOR OPIUM POPPY BECAUSE ALL THE ELEMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CASH CROP ARE PRESENT: KNOWLEDGE OF AND EXPERIENCE WITH THE CROP, INFRASTRUCTURE TO PROCESS THE RAW COTTON; AND A KNOWN INTERNATIONAL MARKET.

WITH 40 YEAR'S COMMERCIAL EXPERIENCE, THE FARMERS KNOW AND UNDERSTAND COTTON CULTIVATION AND ITS VALUE AS A CASH CROP. COTTON PRODUCTION INCREASED IN THE 1990s AT THE SAME TIME OPIUM PRODUCTION WAS INCREASING. THE LOW WAS IN 1994, A YEAR OF TURMOIL WHEN THE TALIBAN CAME TO POWER, WHEN THE GIN BOUGHT ONLY 464 TONS OF RAW COTTON. THE HIGH WAS IN 1998 WHEN THE GIN BOUGHT 9,024 TONS. THE FARMERS WERE SELLING THIS CROP TO THE GIN AT THE SAME TIME THEY WERE PLANTING ONE OF THE LARGEST POPPY CROPS ON RECORD. BY 2000, COTTON PRODUCTION HAD DROPPED TO 4,446 TONS.

MY UNDERSTANDING IS THAT THIS YEAR'S PRODUCTION IS EVEN LOWER. THERE WAS LOW WATER IN THE HELMAND RIVER (AND THE BOGHRA CANAL), SO SOME OF THE LOWER REACHES OF THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM WERE WATER SHORT DURING THE HOT SEASON CROP (COTTON/CORN) PERIOD THIS YEAR. THE WATER SITUATION IN HELMAND HAS NOT IMPROVED YET THIS WINTER. THERE HAS BEEN ONE MINOR RAIN IN THE REGION, BUT AS OF MID-DECEMBER THE FARMERS HAD DELAYED PLANTING WHEAT FOR LACK OF SUFFICIENT WATER. SOME FARMERS HAVE PLANTED POPPY, A CROP REQUIRING LESS WATER, GAMBLING THAT THE FALL OF THE TALIBAN AND THE UNKNOWN ASSOCIATED WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENT, WILL ALLOW THEM TO GET BACK INTO THE OPIUM TRADE.

THE DELAY IN PLANTING WHEAT MAY BE A POLITICAL DECISION RELATING TO THE POTENTIAL POWER OR LACK OF POWER OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT. MUCH MORE AG LAND QUICKLY COULD REVERT TO POPPY. THERE WAS A SIMILAR DELAY IN PLANTING IN FALL 2000 IN RESPONSE TO THE TALIBAN BAN ON POPPY CULTIVATION. THE FARMERS, NOT BELIEVING THE TALIBAN WERE SERIOUS, DELAYED PLANTING. IN THE END, THE FARMERS IN CENTRAL HELMAND PLANTED WHEAT.

BECAUSE OF LIMITED FUNDING AND MARKETING, THE TALIBAN DID NOT PAY CASH FOR THE RAW COTTON BUT ISSUED CHITS FOR THE AMOUNTS OWED TO THE FARMERS. THIS SYSTEM WAS NOT POPULAR WITH THE FARMERS AND LIKELY WAS A LARGE REASON FOR LIMITED COTTON PLANTING IN SPRING 2000. THE TALIBAN PAID THE FARMERS WHEN THE COTTON SOLD. BUT THE FARMERS NEED CASH IN THE FALL IN THIS DOUBLE-CROPPING AND IN-DEBT ECONOMY TO FUND FALL PLANTING OF EITHER WHEAT (THE TRADITIONAL CROP) OR POPPY (THE OTHER CASH CROP). CHITS TO BE PAID OFF IN 2-3 MONTHS DO NOT PAY OFF FARM DEBTS OR BUY FERTILIZER.

THE SYSTEM OF CREDIT THROUGH THE COTTON GIN ENDED WITH THE RUSSIAN INVASION IN 1979 ALONG WITH MANY OTHER GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS. AT THAT TIME, FARMERS

COULD RECEIVE CREDIT, FERTILIZER AND FREE COTTON SEED AT PLANTING TIME TO BE PAID OFF AT THE TIME OF COTTON HARVEST. IN CONTRAST, SPECULATORS IN THE PRIVATE ENTERPRISE OPIUM TRADE FILLED THIS VOID WITH A FORM OF CREDIT, PAYING FARMERS IN ADVANCE SOME PERCENTAGE FOR THE POPPY CROP TO BE PLANTED. OPIUM POPPY PRODUCTION INCREASED BUT COTTON WAS STILL PLANTED AND SOLD TO THE GIN.

ALTHOUGH OPIUM POPPY IS CONSIDERED AN EVIL CROP, THERE REMAINS A READY MARKET FOR RAW OPIUM AND A FORM OF CREDIT TO PLANT IT.

THE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PROCESSING COTTON IS IN PLACE AND FUNCTIONING BUT IN NEED OF MAJOR MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR. THE BRITISH AID PROGRAM BUILT THE LASHKAR GAH COTTON GIN IN THE 1960s. IT IS STILL IN OPERATION AND FUNCTIONED WITH BACK-UP GENERATORS WHEN THE MUJAHIDIN TOOK OUT THE POWER LINES IN THE EARLY '80s. KAJAKI POWER WAS RESTORED WHEN THE TALIBAN DID A PATCH-UP JOB OF REPLACING THE POWER LINE IN 1997-98 WITH THE HELP OF TURKMENISTAN AND PAKISTAN.

THE BRITISH COMPLETED THE SECOND COTTON GIN IN GIRISHK IN 1979 ABOUT THE TIME OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION. IT FUNCTIONED FOR ABOUT TWO SEASONS WHEN THE POWER WAS TAKEN OUT. I AM TOLD THAT THE COMPLETE MACHINERY IS STILL THERE. ONLY ONE CORNER OF THE BUILDING WAS DAMAGED DURING THE RUSSIAN OCCUPATION. IN 1997, SOME PAKISTANI BUSINESS MEN TRIED TO BUY THE COTTON GIN MACHINERY FROM THE TALIBAN GOVERNOR WHO REFUSED THE OFFER. MAJOR MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR WOULD BE REQUIRED TO BRING THIS GIN BACK INTO WORKING ORDER BUT THE MACHINERY IS BASICALLY UNUSED.

IN THE 1960s FARMERS WERE REQUIRED TO CULTIVATE COTTON BUT IT WAS NOT A POPULAR CROP. OTHER CROPS WERE MORE PROFITABLE. BUT A MORE ENLIGHTENED GOVERNMENT POLICY OF THE DAUD REGIME INCREASED THE PRICE PAID TO THE FARMERS FOR RAW COTTON AND COTTON CULTIVATION EXPLODED AS A RESULT. THIS SECOND COTTON GIN WAS STARTED IN THE MID-1970s IN RESPONSE TO THE INCREASING COTTON PRODUCTION IN THE REGION. THE LASHKAR GAH GIN COULD NOT PROCESS THE PRODUCTION IN A TIMELY MANNER AND COTTON CULTIVATION WAS INCREASING IN THE AREAS AROUND GIRISHK, SOME DISTANCE FROM LASHKAR GAH. COTTON WAS THE MAIN CASH CROP IN THE REGION BY THE LATE 1970s. THESE GOVERNMENT COTTON GINS USED TO MARKET THE COTTON ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET TO JAPAN, GERMANY AND BRITAIN, AMONG OTHERS BUT THE RUSSIAN INVASION ENDED THIS PROCESS. THE TALIBAN DID NOT HAVE THE SKILLS TO RE-ESTABLISH THESE MARKETS AND THE U.N. EMBARGOES BLOCKED OUTSIDE HELP. I AM AWARE OF ONE AMERICAN BUYER WORKING OUT OF SINGAPORE THAT HAD A MARKET FOR HELMAND COTTON AND CONTACTED THE TALIBAN JUST BEFORE THE EMBARGO ENDED THE PROCESS. THIS BUYER IS PLANNING A VISIT TO THE REGION AGAIN IN JANUARY 2002. DURING THE TALIBAN YEARS, PRIVATE BUYERS FROM PAKISTAN WERE THE ONLY BIDDERS FOR HELMAND COTTON AND THEY BOUGHT IT AT ROCK-BOTTOM PRICES.

SOME HELMAND COTTON WAS ALSO USED IN A GOVERNMENT COTTON WEAVING MILL IN KANDAHAR BEFORE THE SOVIET INVASION. THE MILL PRODUCED GOOD QUALITY COTTON MATERIAL FOR LOCAL CLOTHING. A U.N. ORGANIZATION THOUGHT OF RE-OPENING THE MILL DURING THE TALIBAN YEARS – BUT TOOK NO ACTION.

THERE ARE 3 SMALL PRIVATELY OWNED COTTON GINS IN THE NAD-I-ALI AND MARJA AREAS (CENTRAL HELMAND) WHERE MOST OF THE COTTON IS GROWN. THESE GINS BUY RAW COTTON APPARENTLY AT GOOD PRICES FOR CASH, UNLIKE THE GOVERNMENT GINS, AND MARKET THE PROCESSED COTTON IN HERAT AND THE TRIBAL AREAS OF PAKISTAN. THESE GINS WERE OUTLAWED BY THE TALIBAN AS THEY COMPETED WITH THE

GOVERNMENT GIN BUT LIKE MANY TALIBAN RULES IN THIS REGION, THEY WERE NOT ENFORCED. THESE GINS WERE NOT SECRET. THE EXISTENCE OF PRIVATELY OWNED COTTON GINS COMPETING WITH THE GOVERNMENT GIN IN THE SAME AREA SUGGESTS THAT COTTON IS AN ECONOMICALLY VIABLE CASH CROP.

COTTON GIN BY-PRODUCTS: IN ADDITION TO PROCESSED COTTON, THE COTTON GIN ALSO PRODUCES SEED CAKE (ANIMAL FEED), COOKING OIL AND SOAP. BEFORE THE WAR, A PERCENTAGE OF THESE PRODUCTS WERE GIVEN BACK TO THE FARMERS WHO PRODUCED THE COTTON. THIS WAS A POPULAR POLICY AS THE SURPLUS COULD BE SOLD ON THE OPEN MARKET.

ACTIONS NEEDED: THE COTTON INDUSTRY IN HELMAND NEEDS HELP. ALL ELEMENTS FOR A SUCCESSFUL CASH CROP (AND POPPY ALTERNATIVE) ARE PRESENT: COTTON, KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND A MARKET. BUT THE FOLLOWING STEPS SHOULD BE TAKEN IMMEDIATELY:

1. FUNDING: THE COTTON GIN HAS NO FUNDING AND NOW REDUCED ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS. FUNDING SHOULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO THE GIN NOW FOR THE CASH PURCHASE OF THE RAW COTTON GROWN THIS PAST CROP SEASON. THIS WOULD GET CASH INTO THE LOCAL ECONOMY, GIVE A BOOST TO THE COTTON INDUSTRY AND GIVE RENEWED CONFIDENCE TO THE FARMERS IN COTTON AS A CASH CROP. THIS ACTION MUST BE ACCOMPANIED WITH A PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN DISAPPROVING OF POPPY AND PROMOTING COTTON FOR CASH NEXT YEAR. AS NOTED, IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHAT THE FARMERS WILL PLANT THIS CROP SEASON: WHEAT OR POPPY. ENFORCEMENT OF A POPPY BAN WITHOUT THE TALIBAN WOULD BE PROBLEMATIC. THE COMING GOVERNMENT, WHATEVER GOVERNMENT, WILL NOT HAVE THE COMBINED RESPECT/FEAR ENGENDERED BY THE TALIBAN FOR AN EFFECTIVE POPPY BAN.
2. MARKET: EFFORTS SHOULD BE MADE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL BUYERS AND THE DONOR COUNTRIES TO RE-ESTABLISH HELMAND COTTON ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET. THIS SHOULD BE A SUBJECT DISCUSSED AT THE COMING DONOR'S CONFERENCE IN JAPAN. THE U.N. EMBARGO MUST BE LIFTED NOW. HELMAND COTTON IS KNOWN FOR ITS GOOD, FINE, LONG STAPLE QUALITY. THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET FOR COTTON MAY BE DOWN AT PRESENT BUT SO IS EVERY OTHER MARKET. THE SUPPORT FOR THE HELMAND COTTON INDUSTRY MUST FOCUS ON LONG TERM GOALS. SUPPORT AND REDEVELOPMENT OF THE HELMAND COTTON INDUSTRY MUST START NOW AS PART OF THE DISASTER RELIEF EFFORT FROM SEVERAL DIFFERENT ANGLES.
3. SEED AND INSECTICIDES: FAO BROUGHT IN UNKNOWN QUANTITIES OF GOOD QUALITY SEED IN THE EARLY 1990's AND M.C.I. BROUGHT IN THE SAME QUALITY OF A LIMITED AMOUNT OF SEED IN 1998, ALL FROM THE SAME CALIFORNIA SEED COMPANY. ADDITIONAL COTTON SEED MIGHT BE CONSIDERED NOW BUT IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT COTTON SEED FROM CENTRAL ASIA (AFGHANISTAN'S NEIGHBORS) SHOULD NOT BE IMPORTED BECAUSE OF INDEMIC DISEASES. ALONG WITH THE SEED, SOME AG EXTENSION WORK SHOULD BE INITIATED. THERE ARE AG EXTENSION PEOPLE FROM THE PAST RESIDING IN THIS REGION THAT COULD BE RE-ACTIVATED. MOST OF THE FARMERS GROWING COTTON UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF RIDGE/ROW-PLANTING COTTON TO INCREASE PRODUCTION BUT SOME HAVE FALLEN BACK INTO BROADCAST PLANTING. A "REFRESHER COURSE" WOULD ALSO EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF RE-ESTABLISHING THIS CASH CROP.

IN THE FALL OF 2000, I RECORDED AN INFESTATION OF APHIDS AND WHITE FLY AFFECTING THE COTTON CROP IN CENTRAL HELMAND. JERRY RANN (A RETIRED U.S.A.I.D ENTOMOLOGIST WHO HAD WORKED FOR SOME 8 YEARS IN HELMAND IN THE 1970s) IDENTIFIED THE INSECTS FROM MY DESCRIPTION OF THE SYMPTOMS AND FORWARDED THE INSECTICIDE SOLUTION. HE SAID THIS WAS A COMMON INFESTATION IN THE REGION AND REQUIRED CONSTANT VIGILANCE. I FORWARDED THE INFORMATION TO SEVERAL CONTACTS IN HELMAND. THE EXTENSION ACTION WOULD INCLUDE AN INSECT CONTROL ELEMENT WITH THE INSECTICIDES PROVIDED THROUGH KNOWLEDGEABLE MERCHANTS IN THE BAZAARS.

4. COTTON GIN REHABILITATION: FUNDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IS NEEDED TO BRING AT LEAST THE LASHKAR GAH GIN BACK UP TO STANDARD. A REHABILITATION COST ESTIMATE WAS MADE IN THE EARLY 1990s BY A CONTRACT COMPANY OUT OF THE U.S. COTTON BELT. A COPY OF THIS ESTIMATE WAS GIVEN TO THE STATE/NARCOTICS OFFICE IN ISLAMABAD IN 1998. AN ADDITIONAL COPY IS WITH H.A.F.O. IN PESHAWAR. THE STAFF OF THE LASHKAR GAH GIN HAS DONE AN OUTSTANDING JOB OF KEEPING THE GIN RUNNING WITH NO HELP, LITTLE FUNDING, AND FOR STARVATION WAGES. MANY OF THESE MEN STARTED WORK AT THE GIN IN THE 1970s. THEY KNOW THE GIN'S PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS. THEY JUST NEED SOME HELP. THE KABUL UNIVERSITY TRAINED MECHANICAL ENGINEER THAT WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN KEEPING THE GIN RUNNING THROUGH THE DECADES OF STRIFE RESIDES IN LASHKAR GAH AND SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE REHABILITATION WORK (ENG. PAYENDA).
5. CREDIT: FUNDING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IS NEEDED TO BEGIN TO RE-ESTABLISH AN AGRICULTURAL CREDIT SYSTEM. SEVERAL OF THE MEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE GOVERNMENT CREDIT SYSTEM OF THE PAST ARE STILL RESIDENTS OF LASHKAR GAH. THE LACK OF CREDIT FURTHER SUPPORTS THE CONTINUATION OF THE OPIUM POPPY INDUSTRY.
6. IRRIGATION REHABILITATION: IMMEDIATELY INITIATE AN EXTENSIVE CENTRAL HELMAND IRRIGATION SYSTEM REHABILITATION PROGRAM DURING THIS WINTER WORK SEASON AND INTO THE HOT SEASON TO IMPROVE THE FLOW OF WATER THROUGH THIS LARGE SYSTEM, BOTH IRRIGATION AND DRAINAGE. THE COTTON SEASON IS DURING THE HOTTEST PART OF THE YEAR AND REQUIRES AN EFFICIENT FLOW OF WATER AND A WELL-MAINTAINED SYSTEM. SUCH A PROGRAM WOULD PUT MANY LABORERS TO WORK THAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE NEEDED FOR THE LABOR INTENSIVE POPPY CROP. IT WOULD PUT NEEDED CASH OR FOOD IN THE HANDS OF A WIDE RANGE OF WORKERS FROM ALL OVER THIS SOUTHERN REGION. THERE IS A TRADITIONAL PATTERN OF FARM LABOR MIGRATION INTO THIS REGION FROM THE MOUNTAINOUS REGIONS TO THE NORTH, AREAS BADLY HIT BY THE DROUGHT. THIS WORK FORCE WOULD IMPROVE THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM AND INCREASE AG PRODUCTION OF COTTON AND THE MAJOR FOOD CROPS OF WHEAT AND CORN. THIS WORK WOULD BE A POLITICAL STATEMENT TO THE PEOPLE IN THIS REGION OF AFGHANISTAN (AN AREA THAT SUPPORTED THE PASHTUN TALIBAN) THAT OUR WAR AGAINST TERRORISM WAS NOT AGAINST THEM. THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS WORK FORCE COULD BE USED AS A MODEL FOR ORGANIZING SIMILAR WORK UNITS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM FOR ORGANIZING A WORK FORCE IN HELMAND WAS DEMONSTRATED BY M.C.I. (MERCY CORPS INTERNATIONAL) AND H.A.F.O. (HELPING AFGHAN FARMERS ORGANIZATION) DURING THE WINTER WORK SEASON OF 1998-99. WE COULD ORGANIZE AN EVEN LARGER WORK FORCE IN A SHORT PERIOD OF TIME WORKING WITH THE SAME INDIGENOUS SOCIAL STRUCTURE, AND KNOWN

AND TESTED ORGANIZERS. WE HAVE HAD A LONG ASSOCIATION WITH THE CENTRAL HELMAND REGION BEGINNING WITH MORRISON-KNUTSEN CONSTRUCTION COMPANY IN 1946 THAT DESIGNED AND BUILT MOST OF THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM. WE HAVE MANY FRIENDS IN THE AREA WITH EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING IN AMERICAN WAYS OF DOING THINGS.

THE LIMITED AND VERY OLD H.A.V.A. HEAVY EQUIPMENT WOULD BE USED AS BACK-UP FOR THE HAND LABOR. THE MECHANICS IN THE H.A.V.A. CHAN-I-ANJIR EQUIPMENT YARD CAN GENERALLY KEEP THIS EQUIPMENT PERIODICALLY RUNNING BUT THEY HAVE NO SPARE PARTS AND VERY LIMITED TOOLS AND FACILITIES. SUPPORT NEEDS TO BE GIVEN TO REVIVE THIS IMPORTANT EQUIPMENT YARD, ORIGINALLY BUILT BY MORRISON-KNUTSEN. IT IS PERHAPS THE LARGEST SUCH FACILITY IN THE COUNTRY. SOME SPARE PARTS (IF STILL AVAILABLE) ARE NEEDED AND ORDERS FOR SOME NEW HEAVY EQUIPMENT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED, STARTING WITH DRAG-LINES FOR CLEANING DEEP MAIN DRAINS. SOME TEN UNUSED BUCKETS AND BOOMS FOR DRAGLINES, ORDERED BY U.S.A.I.D. JUST BEFORE THE RUSSIAN INVASION, REMAIN IN THE EQUIPMENT YARD. THE REST OF THE ORDER STOPPED IN KARACHI.

AS PREVIOUSLY NOTED, RELIABLE AND PROVEN AFGHAN NGOs LIKE H.A.F.O. SHOULD BE CONTRACTED DIRECTLY BY DONORS RATHER THAN SUB-CONTRACTED THROUGH RECOGNIZED INTERNATIONAL NGOs. THE PRESENT SUB-CONTRACTING METHODS SOMETIME LEAD TO ABUSES AND ARE UNFAIR TO PROVEN AFGHAN ORGANIZATIONS.

THE DROUGHT IS INTO ITS THIRD YEAR. WHEN THE HELMAND RIVER (REPRESENTING SOME 40 PERCENT OF AFGHANISTAN'S SURFACE WATER) IS LOW ENOUGH TO REDUCE CROP PRODUCTION IN CENTRAL HELMAND, IT IS A DISASTER FOR THE FARMERS, FARM LABOR AND THE NATION. CENTRAL HELMAND IS ONE OF THE "BREAD BASKETS" OF THE NATION. THIS HAND-LABOR FOCUS WOULD ADDRESS THE DISASTER IN THIS REGION, IMPROVE THE LARGEST IRRIGATION SYSTEM IN THE COUNTRY FOR BETTER TIMES, AND SET THE STAGE FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT. COTTON HAS BEEN AND REMAINS THE ESTABLISHED PRIMARY CASH CROP FOR THE REGION IN NEED OF HELP.

OTHER CASH CROPS:

1. VEGETABLES, BOTH WINTER AND SUMMER, ARE GROWN BY A LIMITED NUMBER OF FARMERS ON A COMMERCIAL BASIS IN CENTRAL HELMAND. WITH SOME HELP IN MARKETING, THIS VEGETABLE INDUSTRY COULD BE EXPANDED. AT THE PRESENT TIME THE PRIMARY MARKETS ARE IN PAKISTAN BUT THE INTERNAL MARKETS SHOULD DEVELOP IF THE FIGHTING ACTUALLY ENDS AND THE ECONOMY BEGINS TO RECOVER. THE PROBLEM WITH THE PAKISTAN MARKETS IS THAT PAKISTANI FARMERS ALSO RAISE VEGETABLES, i.e., COMPETITION. THE COMMONLY KNOWN COMMERCIAL VEGETABLES INCLUDE CAULIFLOWER, CARROT, SPINACH, PEAS, CUCUMBER, OKRA, EGGPLANT, TOMATO AND ONION. VEGETABLES LIKE ONION THAT STORE WELL IN A DRY CLIMATE COULD BE AN EARLY START UP FOCUS. BUT THE PERISHABLE VEGETABLE MARKETS NEED STUDY.
2. MELON IS ANOTHER CASH CROP GROWN IN HELMAND, BOTH LOCAL AND WATERMELON FROM IMPORTED SEED. TO MY KNOWLEDGE, CANTALOEPE HAS NOT BEEN INTRODUCED INTO THE AREA.

3. ALFALFA IS AN ANIMAL FEED CROP OF IMPORTANCE THAT COULD ALSO BE DEVELOPED WITH A REPUTABLE SEED SOURCE TO START. MANY SMALL FARMERS MAINTAIN SMALL PLOTS OF ALFALFA OR CLOVER FOR THEIR MILK ANIMALS.
4. PEANUTS ARE GROWN COMMERCIALY IN AT LEAST ONE DISTRICT OF NAD-I-ALI WHERE I NOTICED SOME FARMERS CHANGING THE TEXTURE OF THEIR FIELDS WITH THE ADDITION OF SAND FROM NEARBY WASHES. MUCH OF THE SOIL IN THE NAD-I-ALI AND MARJA AREAS TEND TO BE TIGHT CLAY-BASED SOILS THAT THE FARMERS CONTINUALLY TRY TO IMPROVE. I WAS TOLD THAT THERE WAS A GOOD MARKET IN HERAT THAT BOUGHT ALL THE PEANUTS THAT COULD BE PRODUCED. THE FARMERS BELIEVED THAT THE PEANUTS WERE ACTUALLY FOR THE IRANIAN MARKET. THE PRODUCE APPEARED TO BE LARGE AND GOOD QUALITY NUTS SIMILAR TO OUR JUMBO VIRGINIA PEANUTS. IN 2000, I GAVE SOME OF THE FARMERS SAMPLES OF THE VIRGINIA PEANUT SEEDS TO TRY. PEANUTS HAVE THE POTENTIAL FOR BECOMING A MAJOR COMMERCIAL CROP. THE HERAT BUYERS COME TO NAD-I-ALI FOR THE PRODUCE AND SHOULD BE CONTACTED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FOR AN EXPANDED MARKET.
5. CUMIN IS GROWN COMMERCIALY IN THE FOOTHILL REGIONS OF HELMAND PROVINCE AND IN SOUTH HELMAND ON THE INDIGENINOUSLY DEVELOPED IRRIGATION SYSTEMS WHERE THERE MAY BE LESS WATER. IT IS NOT A CROP GROWN IN CENTRAL HELMAND. PERHAPS IT IS A LESS SALT TOLERENT CROP BUT ENQUIRIES ARE NEEDED TO DETERMININE WHY IT IS NOT GROWN. THE FARMERS IN THIS REGION TEND TO BE INNOVATIVE AND ALWAYS ON THE LOOKOUT FOR NEW, PROFITABLE CROPS.