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# FIRST PERSON

## Sowing Better Wheat With Less Water

**3,700 farmers boost profits through drought-tolerant wheat variety**



Photo: USAID/Kaukab Jhumra Smith

Abdul Khaliq, a farmer from Mahool Baloch village in Loralai district, gathers his abundant wheat harvest.

***“There’s a big difference in the quality of the grain. The height is shorter, but the profit is higher,” said Abdul Khaliq, a farmer from Mahool Baloch village in Loralai district.***

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When the wheat began to grow, Abdul Khaliq wasn’t sure he had made the right decision by switching to this new variety of wheat. The young wheat crop looked shorter, and Khaliq worried it would not produce as much grain. He soon saw his fears were unfounded.

Khaliq is a farmer from Mahool Baloch village in Pakistan’s vast Balochistan province. He is one of 3,700 farmers in three Baloch districts participating in a USAID program to promote better land and water management. Before the program began, an eight-year dry spell had hobbled many local farmers, most of whom rely on subsistence crops or small-scale cash crops. USAID responded by subsidizing 450 tons of an improved variety of irrigated wheat that is drought-tolerant, resistant to disease, and has a higher yield potential than traditional varieties. USAID demonstrated the wheat’s effectiveness to local farmers by first planting it along the roadside, with consent from the property owner, so that it would grab the attention of local communities. The plan worked. Farmers like Khaliq were interested, and bought seeds at 50 percent of their value from the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization. USAID paid for the rest.

When the harvest came in, Khaliq was stunned: he sowed just 150 kilograms of the new seed but the harvest yielded 4,000 kilos of wheat — about three times more than his usual yield. Although the stalks were short, each new seed sprouted eight stalks rather than the usual five, and each stalk bore twice as much grain. “There’s a big difference in the quality of the grain,” Khaliq said. “The height is shorter, but the profit is higher.” Also, Khaliq did not need to water the crop as often. “I used to water my wheat 10 to 12 times a season,” he said. This time, he watered half as often. Water usage declined because of both the seed variety and, thanks to USAID-sponsored education efforts, greater awareness of irrigation needs. “Many farmers were wasting up to 70 percent of their water,” said Dr. Aijaz Hussain, a national water resource management expert. “We taught them how to control irrigation methods.” Showing off plump bundles of wheat, Khaliq said that this year, his 30-strong household would not need to buy the usual extra six to eight sacks of wheat to meet their needs. He calculated, with pride, that the total savings added up to at least 7,500 rupees (\$125).