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Algeria: Implementing Sustainable Practices for Raising Livestock and Poultry

Algeria is a country that has been faced with internal fighting since the early 1950's. In 1954 after nearly a century of French rule, Algeria rose up as a nation, and declared their independence in 1962 after eight years of intense fighting. The Algerian War was a dirty war, being fought with torture, the murder of civilians, and the burning and bombing of what is estimated to be several hundred thousand acres of farmland and buildings within the city limits. In the end, over 350,000 French troops lost their lives, and more than 150,000 Algerian Nationalists also lost their lives. Apart from that, it was estimated by the Algerian Government in 1964 that over 70,000 civilians had lost their lives as well.

As a result of the bloody fighting from the Algerian War, millions of people were displaced from their homes, and many farmers and business owners came back from the war to find their houses and businesses looted, damaged, and in some cases, destroyed. This had a tremendous impact on the society of Algeria at the time, as the country was celebrating a victory, but on the brink of defeat by a new enemy, starvation. Starvation caused the inflation in prices of livestock and poultry, leading the inflation of food prices all over the country.

Today, agriculture makes up 8.1% of the total goods produced and services provided in Algeria every year. While 14% of the entire Algerian population is employed in an agricultural field, nearly 10% of Algeria's population is unemployed. The unemployment rate is commonly linked to the widespread violence of terrorist organizations within the country, as well as sketchy relations between Algeria, and the bordering country of Morocco.

In 2006, the GSPC, (An Algerian terrorist group) merged together with a group known as al-Qaeda, and began bombing civilian property, and kidnapping people and holding them for ransom. By 2002, the UN estimated that over 1,000,000 people had been displaced from their homes. This includes farmers owning not only livestock, but farm ground as well.

Even today, only 3% of Algeria's total land mass is cultivated ground, therefore, their agricultural economy heavily depends on the production of livestock and poultry. This heavily dependant economy means implementing sustainable practices for raising livestock and poultry is a very important issue in this part of the world. With such a low percentage of cultivated land, the Algerians have taken to livestock production, although, some people can't afford the choice. For them, it is raise animals successfully or face starvation and poverty.

Because of this choice of raising animals or starving, it is very important for the well being of individual farmers, and for the economy and food supply for the entire country of Algeria, that the implementation of a method to raise livestock and poultry is put in place and closely followed.

It is a very unfortunate fact that agriculture is not the only thing to consider when raising livestock in Algeria. Farmers largest concerns are safety of his farm and family in what has been called the 13th most dangerous country in the world. Even today, the country's security is threatened by terrorist groups, as well as the agriculture industry, which proves invaluable among

most militant groups with hungry mouths to feed, such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Magrab, both high profile Islamic extremist groups in North Africa that have a high activity in Algeria.

Because of the imminent danger to most Algerian families, they need to be sure they can risk loosing crops and livestock, and even their livelihood. It is estimated by the CIA that over 90,000 people are displaced per year as a result of human trafficking alone. It is not a foreign thing to see a family taken from their home with the father killed, the sons brainwashed into soldiers or forced to be laborers, and the mother and daughter sold as sex slaves. The Algerian government has done little to stop this, and it is unsafe on the outskirts of many major cities, including the capitol city of Algiers, so imagine the risks of living on an isolated family farm.

Due to the risk of living on an isolated family farm, Algerian farmers need larger breeds of livestock and poultry, and more of them. In addition, more farm security would also be a very valuable, however, it is not to the point where it is required. While troop presence would be of value to many farmers, a better solution may be a sharecropper farm.

In a sharecropper farm, a farmer is given a place to live for free, and allowed to grow crops and raise livestock and poultry, at expense of the owners receiving 50% of the produce. If there government were to put this in place, there would be several benefits not only for the general population, but for the government as well.

The first benefit of a sharecropper farm would be the address of the security issue. More people in an enclosed farm would make the chances of survival of both the farmers and the crops much higher. In addition, if the government put this in place, they would be better inclined to protect it from threats. With more security provided small family owned farms would have security they would have the security they so desperately need.

Another benefit would be the group of farmers. Farmers could offer each other help and tips, and even barter and trade in the community a sharecropping farm would create. In a similar environment, farmers could develop their own form of trade entirely to fit their needs. Rather than having to venture out in search of a highly needed tool, a farmer could simply rent it from a neighbor using monetary pay, crop, or allowing rent of another farming tool as a form of payment. The possibilities are nearly endless.

Yet another benefit of a sharecropper farm would be the benefit of not only farmers, but of the government as well. Farmers would have food, shelter, and the ability to sell what they produced for money, increasing the value of life significantly, as they would have a safe place to live, bountiful food, and money to spend on necessities, as well as luxuries. In return, the government would receive 50% of the livestock and crop product produced at the farm. This could be used to feed their troops against the fight against terrorists, to feed the people of Algeria, and hundreds of other uses. Food is a valuable commodity in the world, as it is one of few things humans absolutely need in order to survive when it come to the bottom line.

Another large benefit of sharecropper farms, when involving to livestock and poultry would be medical service. Diseases like H5N1, SARS, and Nipah viruses are a major problem among livestock, and even more so in Africa where diseases have been known to thrive. In general, due to the lack of medical attention available, loosing livestock is a common thing that can be changed with proper medical attention. Medical attention can be called upon to service animals in a large group. There is also the possibility of a veterinarian to be a part of the livestock sharecropper, and they can provide services if needed.

Finally, another benefit of sharecropper farms would be the development of the agriculturally industry as a whole in Algeria. With several farmers coming together to share experience and manpower, crops can be grown efficiently. This in turn means when the livestock and poultry head count is sufficient, farmers can branch out, sell to other sharecroppers, and possibly rotate after a period of time to other farms to share experience, helping others along the way.

Through livestock and poultry sharecropping, people have the potential to come together and do great things. They will have a near infinite pool of knowledge to share with others, and a secure place to farm and live in peace.

Sharecropping has worked in Africa in the past, and in most countries in the colonial era. They were then seen as late as the 1930's in many African countries as well. Now sharecroppers have appeared in modern times, and are very successful in countries such as Zimbabwe and Ghana, giving reason to believe that it will work again in Algeria.

Apart from Africa, sharecropping, both with livestock and plants have worked throughout the history of the US. Since its foundation in the Civil War, to its use in the Great Depression, it has proved to be a successful method of plant and livestock production when we were in need, so I see no reason it would not work for Algeria while they were in need.

I spoke to Sarah Dorman, a member of a farmer-to-farmer program from my local area. On her last assignment, she took a trip to Africa to help the locals grow and market their plant and livestock crop. Sarah said that "The locals rarely visited other villages, and phones were something that the richest villages only had one or two of, so their experience is limited to what their ancestors knew, and the ancestors before them knew as well." Sarah then went on to say, "The locals didn't have a word for genetics, as it is a foreign concept to them. It took five minutes to translate most scientific words dealing with agriculture." This is why experience is needed among farmers.

Rather than Sarah going village to village, she could stop at one sharecropper and share her knowledge with them, and they could spread it among the farm for years. This would be a tremendous help to almost everyone, as rather than going from isolated farm to isolated farm, multiple people could benefit at once.

Experiences from Sarah's trip, along with photos and experiences, led me to believe that Algeria can't house large farms like we can here in the US. She told me about how a village she stayed in had an inadequate electricity supply. It was so problematic in fact; that there was a six-minute window (9:26pm-9:32pm) that the electricity was in enough supply that she could use running water. Farms that do have running water can usually only afford to run the pump once a week, causing them to have to flood their field and rapidly fill as many buckets of water as they can. Due to the lack of water and electricity, large confinements and other buildings would not be plausible.

Apart from physical obstacles, there are cultural barriers as well. In Algeria, as well as many other surrounding African nations, stealing is unheard of. A man caught stealing will be shunned by his or her family, and cast out. Another cultural difference is the freedom of livestock. Sarah claimed that she only saw one pen that housed livestock on her entire trip. Livestock not penned up were given the option to roam free, and would usually return that night.

Livestock industries would also be affected by an introduction of different breeds of livestock. The culture of Africa had always been, according to Sarah, "If it works for them, it will work for me." This means if my neighbor raises goats, and he does well, if I raise goats, I will surely do well too. Out of popularity of production, and religious restraints on pork for a large part of the population, goat is all but completely dominate in Algeria's livestock industry. An introduction of cattle and chickens would create a larger selection of livestock, and benefit the prices of goat. The two other introduced animals would benefit the economy in a way that would drive supply down and demand up, but not in the way that would cause any shortages. This would allow farmers to make a better profit on animals, allowing them to possibly afford in time better tools, animals, and private placement away from a sharecropper.

Something important to consider about poultry, is that chickens lay eggs. Eggs could easily become an invaluable resource to farmers, if their chickens were allowed to lay in a safe environment. Eggs are an excellent source of protein, and according to the American Egg Board, eggs help with health in the brain, eyes, and muscles, as well as playing a key role in weight management and healthy pregnancies. Apart from all of this, the eggs come in their own protective casing, a shell. With this, they are durable, easy to obtain, and ready to eat almost instantly.

Current Algerian methods for raising livestock include open grazing, and require a lot of attention by means of acquiring food and water for the livestock. Water is not readily available for a lot of the farmers, as they have no means to dig and tap into a well. This requires some farmers to spend countless hours finding a water source and taking it back to their farm in buckets, and in some cases, bowls and cups, according to Sarah, who told of a farmer who would spend every Wednesday walking to and from the nearest stream with a ten gallon bucket, getting water for his cattle. Sharecropping could help farmers acquire a ready source of water, or at least allow for the work to be out upon a group of people, allowing others to help with the livestock at home.

As previously stated, Algeria is a country that isn't necessarily falling apart. However, due to terrorism and other problems, they will need help agriculturally to keep their Ag industry from suffering. Although there are several methods that could be practiced side by side, and people that can provide aid from the peace corps and other farmer to farmer programs like the one Sarah participates in, I think the sharecropping method would really benefit Algeria due to the position the country is currently in. Through sharecropping, they have very much to gain, and I think that with a little hard work and commitment, the country of Algeria can eventually thrive with an abundant food supply once the locals are educated and cooperative with their farming.

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