

Helping Pakistani farmers recover from floods: the CRS response

by Tom Remington

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CRS-supported assessment team. Arielle Moinester/CRS



Water receding from farmland in Sindh Province. Arielle Moinester/CRS

The recent flooding in Pakistan has been a disaster for farmers. Many families lost their crops as well as their homes, seed stores, stables and livestock. Farmers throughout the flood-affected areas need to plant wheat during the October/November planting season, but where and how will they get the seed?

CURRENT SOURCES

We know that Pakistani farmers need a lot of wheat seed – up to 100 kilos to plant one hectare. Roughly half the seed they use is from their own saved stocks. The other half comes from the formal seed sector. If farmers have lost their stored wheat seed, how can they afford to purchase sufficient seed after losing the income from their current crop?

VARIETY PREFERENCES

Most Pakistani wheat farmers grow modern varieties. In the past eight years, thirty new varieties have been released. Farmers obtain information on the performance of the new varieties from their neighbors and, when a good one comes along, it spreads very quickly. Wheat varieties need to be locally tested for adaptability – including day length, temperature and resistance to rust diseases. *Importing seed of untested varieties from distant locations is risky unless done by knowledgeable wheat breeders and researchers.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ASSESSMENT

While it is crucial to determine the floods' impact on lives and livelihoods, it is equally important to rapidly assess the condition of the seed system. Doing so helps aid agencies understand underlying issues and determine how to support farmers in managing their own recovery by sourcing and accessing seed that meets their specific quality and variety criteria. CRS' recent assessment focused on answering three vital questions:

- **Where will farmers get seed if they lost the seed that they had stored?**
- **Will they have the financial resources to purchase what they need?**
- **What will they do if their usual sources do not have adequate supply?**

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

There are three guiding principles for seed assistance to farmers recovering from the floods:

- **Support farmers to manage their own seed system**
- **Help them access the varieties they prefer from the sources they trust**
- **Monitor and evaluate the activity to learn how to assist farmers so they can quickly and sustainably recover from disaster**



Seed saved by local farmer. Arielle Moinester/CRS

WHY SEED VOUCHERS?

Although the current flooding has had a devastating impact on rural livelihoods, we know that markets continue to function and that farmers are best placed to manage their own recovery. To assist, CRS proposes to issue eligible farmers with vouchers that they can redeem for wheat and other seed from suppliers they trust. In addition to ensuring that farmers get good seed, this approach puts money into the local economy. This decentralized, demand-driven approach has proven superior to the large-scale centralized direct procurement and distribution of seed.

For more information on CRS' Rapid Seed System Security Assessment in Pakistan and on the Seed Voucher Approach please contact:

Jack Byrne
Country Representative Pakistan
Jbyrne@crspk.org

Tom Remington
Principal Agriculture Advisor
Tremington@earo.crs.org

Giving farmers vouchers puts money into the local economy rather than the pockets of distant businessmen.