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## To Progress, first think Progressive

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*“My father was a conventional farmer, growing only wheat and maize, whereas I have been experimenting on our farm since age 17. The LPH staff guided us in forming Business Interest Groups to make agriculture a more profitable venture. I can safely say it has only brought me happiness and prosperity! We learned how to send our produce in group so that the costs for transportation and the purchase of inputs are shared by all of us. Now I lend money to the needy. This way, people can meet their urgencies, especially illnesses. I do not want them to lose their life just the way my mother did because of lack of money.”*

**Aseel Khan, farmer, village Sheikh Mela, Shingao valley, FR DI Khan**

My forefathers and I did not receive any education but that was the least of our worries. One had to survive somehow. Besides giving a hand to my father in farming I also worked on daily wages. It was really hard to meet the expenses with the conventional crops (wheat and maize) that my father would grow. When I reached the age of 17, I decided to bring more variety under cultivation as I had observed a few other farmers buy tomato, cabbage and onion seeds from the nearby town of Daraban. So we started growing tomatoes and onions. At that time, I had no clue about good quality seed, input and yield. The concept of different varieties was not known to me and would buy whatever was recommended by the input dealer, as I relied on their opinion and recommendation.

In 2013 the LPH started working in our area with the farmers. For the test run they gave a bag of tomato seeds of the variety T1369 to 12-15 to farmers who were progressive and were willing to try. I also decided to try this seed on my land. My father and I were really amazed with the results! Nearly 3 times more yield than the previous variety I used to cultivate. The size of tomatoes was also bigger, shelf life was longer and it was not rotting even after 3 to 4 days. On top of that it fetched a good price. Then next year again it was provided to 30 to 35 farmers but on 50% cost-sharing basis. The results were again promising. I still remember that other farmers used to come to my field just to observe my tomatoes. They used to ask for the seed and method I adopted for the cultivation.

The LPH staff also guided us through the process of forming Business Interest Groups to make it a more profitable venture. We learnt that sending our produce as a group saves us the high transportation and other associated costs. It is the same with the purchase of inputs. Now we purchase in bulk for the group rather than individually. It has opened more cost effective avenues for us as we nominate one person responsible. Another



good thing about this is that everyone gets the same quality input at a similar rate which is cheaper than when we buy it individually. Previously, I never knew that plant diseases have a whole separate Department. Through

LPH we farmers were introduced to the agriculture officers who informed us about the existence of a pest management department and about the separate medicines, pesticides and sprays for the plants. We exchanged phone numbers and since then I seek their advice on different issues in farming. Similarly, through the officers we got to know about the authorized input suppliers who offer quality inputs on good rates. The local input supplier in Darazinda (nearby town) was also trained and linked with the input supplying companies by the LPH and that helped us a lot as we are all in contact with each other. I have observed that now he has more knowledge about the inputs. Previously we had to go to the main city for the supplies but now it is all so close. As he knows us well, we can borrow the supplies and pay later when we have money. Market exposure has been a very interesting experience for us. Darazinda was the only local market we had ever visited to sell our produce but with the LPH we were taken to new markets in other towns. We were not well informed about the market prices of vegetables but now we can compare the prices in different markets by phone and decide which market may be more feasible and profitable so we send our produce there accordingly.

This year before Ramadan<sup>1</sup>, I made a mistake by checking on just Draban market and sold my tomatoes for PKR 1,400. Later, I received a phone call from Zhob<sup>2</sup> market that they were offering PKR 2,500. I then sent the rest of the produce to Zhob. With the exposure to new markets, we have more linkages and people recognize us. It had been only a year that I started growing garlic for commercial purposes. This year we got a good garlic yield and could send 3 Hilux pickups full of garlic to Multan<sup>3</sup> market as a test run. In Multan, all the vegetables were sold within two days at a good price (PKR 1600-1800 per bag). A middle man from Multan also visited me to negotiate the purchase of garlic in future.

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<sup>1</sup> Fasting month for Muslim world

<sup>2</sup> A market situated in neighboring Balochistan province, at about four hours' drive

<sup>3</sup> Situated in Punjab province, about 10 hours' drive

Similarly, the produce sent to DI Khan market also fetched a good price. I also grow coriander and green chilies and they sell well too. The years of my relationship with the LPH have made me observe the difference between conventional and modern practices. In conventional farming little income is earned from tedious efforts. With new techniques and quality inputs, the income and profit are worth the effort. With that raised income I have managed to increase cultivable land up to 4 times the original one. I have also learnt to increase the yield of my products e.g. one bag of garlic seed (20 KG) would grow a produce of 30 KG.

After the most valid recommendations and trainings on progressive farming techniques by the LPH, I got a yield equal to 50 bags from one bag of seed. We were also taken on an exposure visit to Balochistan to compare their yield and learn techniques. I was astonished to see that they were reaping a yield of 100 bags from one bag of seed. I am planning to grow more garlic next year by replicating the practices I learnt in Balochistan. The agricultural market is very fragile and fluctuates a lot. My father is old now and can no longer assist me in farming, my brother is mentally challenged and my son is studying so I am the sole earner, hence have to make an extra effort to meet the needs of the family. However, adopting new practices and growing a variety of vegetables, has brought in good profits. I have given a part of my land on Ijarah<sup>4</sup> to four people. Utilising some of my savings, I have started rehabilitating part of the non-cultivable land into cultivable.

My son has reached matriculation and I prefer for him to continue his education. Next year he will be in his college. I am thankful to Allah that my life is much better than before. I remember my mother on her death bed and I had no money to take her to the doctor. She died and I could not do anything as that was the time when I used to borrow money just to



be able to arrange food for the family. But now the situation is different. Now I lend money to the needy, help them buy wheat flour bag whenever possible, I especially help patients for treatment as my mother's vision stands before me. May she rest in peace.

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<sup>4</sup> Ijarah is about the contract between a lessor and lessee in which the lessor being the owner of the property allows the lessee to enjoy the usufructs of the property at agreed terms on the rental and period of lease