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SNAPSHOT

Composting: A Squiggly New Venture

An innovative business is poised to provide an organic substitute for chemical fertilizer while helping the environment and creating jobs for women.



Photos: ABADE

Composting beds at the Green Organic Farm are ready for seeding with worms and organic waste.

Hakima Zolfaghari had a great business idea – to produce organic fertilizer on a commercial scale through vermicomposting, while promoting organic farming and training women to create their own nutrient-rich compost for kitchen gardens.

“My husband and I have been discussing this idea for some time and were very eager to get it started. Afghanistan is an agricultural economy and is heavily dependent on imported fertilizers, seeds and other agricultural inputs. I thought we could begin producing our own fertilizer and in the process be able to hire a lot of women, or train them so they can start their own backyard composting,” Hakima said.

With the support of her husband, Hakima set up a company, Green Organic, in May 2013. It is the first vermicomposting business enterprise of its kind in Afghanistan.

In order to facilitate her dream, Hakima presented her business plan to two USAID projects, IDEA/NEW and ABADE, who helped her get her business off the ground. IDEA/NEW assisted Hakima with the technical aspects of vermicomposting, helped her construct the composting beds and taught her how to care for the worms.

At the same time, Hakima brought her business idea to ABADE, which saw that the business idea was innovative, sustainable, had the potential to be scaled, and would provide opportunities for women. In return for a matching investment of capital, land and manpower, ABADE provided material inputs and equipment to Green Organic. This included 400 kg of worm for composting, which were delivered to Green Organic in early November 2013. The farm has an area of 450 sqm, enough capacity to produce 100 tons of vermicompost a year.

“We have started operations,” enthused Hakima. “I hope this venture will be the start of a new industry in Afghanistan that will significantly reduce imports of chemical fertilizers while sustainably managing waste and providing women with a viable livelihood option.”