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Egypt Cotton And Rice Market Information Systems



APRP

Reform Design and Implementation Unit

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Report No. 131

*Egypt Cotton And Rice
Market
Information Systems*

*By
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Executive Summary

The purpose of the assignment was to develop a marketing information system for cotton and rice as mandated by the Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade to increase export. The purpose of this marketing information is to make information readily available to producers, exporters, importers and decision-makers. This information system will be posted on the World Wide Web and will be available worldwide. The assignment benefited from a team of highly professional individuals and meetings with exporters, policy-makers and researchers in both sectors. Both web sites are now posted on the World Wide Web at <http://www.agpolicy.com> for testing. A decision needs to be made regarding their respective ownership, update and maintenance.

The initial three weeks led to the collection and analysis of data from various sources. These data were then converted into tables and graphs and were reconverted into web-based html files to be posted on the World Wide Web. Two separate web sites were developed initially and while these are still under development, their frameworks have been fully established and will be upgraded as data become available.

While the assignment calls for training a local person to perform the maintenance of these initial web sites, we did not find time to perform this function. Data collection and analysis used up a much larger portion of the time allocated and this interface has been postponed until later date. This is also partially due to the fact that these preliminary sites are not ready to be published on the World Wide Web yet.

The assignment team will continue to collect and analyze data. Results from these analyses will be forwarded to Dr. Adoum to transform them into hypertext to be published on the World Wide Web. Individuals within the project will be trained to download and convert raw data during this phase.

Most members of both rice and cotton sectors lack knowledge in information technology, particularly with respect to using the Internet and electronic communication. These individuals need to be trained so they can access information posted on both websites.

This preliminary phase revealed the complexity with which data can be gathered. This in a sense pushes the testing period slightly farther. We expect to publish both sites on the Internet in about two months. The testing period will begin after the sites are published.

Acknowledgements

This assignment would have not been feasible without the dedication of the individuals assigned to the task and the RDI Management Team. I would like to thank Dr. Edgar Ariza-Nino, the assignment supervisor, for his dedication and guidance throughout the assignment. Thanks also go to the Drs. Ibrahim Siddik, Magdy ElGuindy, and Ragaa El Amir for their thorough understanding of cotton and rice sectors and their dedication and believe in the usefulness of this assignment.

I would like to thank Drs. Max Goldenhson and Jane Gleason, Chief of Party and Deputy Chief of Party for their enthusiasm and friendship. Their support made a significant contribution to the outcome.

Special thanks go to RDI support staff for their enthusiasm in carrying out searches and typing tables. I would like to thank Heba Hosny, Dina El-Behery, Aya Karim, Nehal Adel, and Mona.

Thanks also go to Ms. Eva of the APRP/MVE Unit for providing an electronic copy of the Baseline Report from which we took rice data tables.

Thanks also go to Ms. Maie Shwaky the Agriculture-Led Export Businesses for scanning the RTTC pictures.

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List of Acronyms

ACC	The Agricultural Commodity Council
ALCOTEXA	The Alexandria Cotton Export Association
ALEB	The Agriculture-Led Export Businesses
APRP	Agricultural Policy Reform Project
GOEIC	General Organization for Export and Import Control
MVE	Monitoring, Verification and Evaluation
RDI	Reform Design and Implementation
RTTC	The Rice Technology Training Center
The Wayout.net	The Internet Service Provider
TIC-Egypt	Trade Information Center-Egypt
Wakalex	The Wakil Import and Export Company in Alexandria

Egyptian Cotton and Rice Market Information Systems

Introduction

The purpose of this assignment was to develop market information systems for cotton and rice. These market information systems aim to provide exporters timely access to information to facilitate their decision-making. This will be accomplished by the design and hosting of two web sites on the World Wide Web. These web sites will be hosted separately and will contain information useful to producers, marketers, exporters, researchers and policy makers in Egypt. These web sites will also provide a readily available source of information to the world particularly to individuals that have access to the Internet.

The mechanics of establishing these sites involved the participation of senior researchers from two universities and key individuals from the private business community. This report will highlight steps undertaken to accomplish part of what has been described in the scope of work. The report will formulate preliminary recommendations leading toward the successful completion and hosting of those web sites. Readers are advised to navigate the two sites to appreciate efforts made.

Methodology

The methodology section discusses steps taken to identify and collect data leading to the successful completion of the assignment. As indicated in the scope of work, this assignment sought to identify and gather data from various sources in Egypt. The RDI Unit hired outside consultants who are familiar with both cotton and rice sectors. The assignment also benefits from the presence of Dr. Edgar Ariza-Nino, the resident RDI Cotton Expert and Team Leader for this assignment. The initial steps consisted of meeting various people from government, researchers and private sectors. These include trade associations, private individuals and research centers. Data were also secured from studies previously conducted by the APRP's units of the Monitoring, Verification and Evaluation and the Reform, Design and Implementation Unit.

In the initial phase, the assignment team met 3 times weekly or as often as needed to establish contacts with various segments from the two sectors. The assignment team met with the Chairman of the Alexandria Cotton Export Association (ALCOTEXA) in Cairo and the board members of the Agricultural Commodity Council (ACC). The assignment team met with Mr. Samir El-Naggari, Vice-Chairman of the Agricultural Commodity Council and rice exporter. He then invited the team to attend the board meeting of the ACC and discuss the assignment with the board members.

The team also traveled to Alexandria and met with Alcotexa board members and their MIS Manager. The team met separately with the Director of the Rice Technology Training Center (RTTC) and at a later date met with Mr. Ahmed El Wakil, President of Wakalex to discuss the objectives of the assignment and data needs.

The team also met with Mr. Youssef Morad, Head of General Organization for Export and Import Control to discuss data needs.

The team and Dr. Max Goldensohn met with M. El Said M. Abou El Komsan, First Under Secretary of the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade in charge of Foreign Trade Sector. We showed him the two web sites and was very enthusiastic about these preliminary results.

The team also met with Eng. Amr A. Agamawi, Executive Manager of the Trade Information Center (TIC-Egypt) and discussed mechanism through which we can cooperate.

These data are processed into tables and/or graphs by Dr. Ariza-Nino and forwarded to Dr. Adoum to convert them into web publishable material to be posted on the web site.

Progress to date

Two web site frames have been developed. Both are mapped with navigational menus according to the specifications of the Scope of Work. The assignment team meets on a regular basis to review progress to date with respect to analysis and web design. These web sites are viewed locally and adjusted progressively as data become available. A presentation was made to the APRP Unit on Thursday, 22 February 2001. Folks present at the presentation made useful comments and reviewed accomplishments to date. These comments will be incorporated into each website before final presentation to the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation and to the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade when suitable.

What needs to be done?

While data on cotton have been easily gathered and processed, those on rice have been more challenging. Nevertheless the assignment team succeeded in securing rice data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, CAPMAS, and from Studies conducted by the MVE Unit. The team evaluated progress to date on Monday, February 19, 2001 and identified additional rice data source. These sources provided additional data, particularly on rice. These data were incorporated into the web design and presented to the APRP Unit on Thursday, February 22, 2001.

A. Cotton

As mentioned in the section progress to date above, data on cotton were readily available at the project site. Dr. Edgar Ariza-Nino is the resident cotton expert and was fully equipped with all necessary data. We also profited from the Alcotexa website which publishes weekly raw data from which Dr. Ariza-Nino supplement his analyses for the assignment. The team met with Mr. Amin Abaza, Vice-Chairman of Alcotexa and briefed him on the objectives of the assignment. Mr. Abaza was very instrumental in getting the ALCOTEXA board members to meet with the team after their board meeting in Alexandria.

B. Rice

While rice data were not abundantly or readily available compared to cotton data, the team succeeded in identifying and securing a significant amount useful for these

preliminary activities. These data came from Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, Rice Technology Training Center (RTTC), CAPMAS, Wakalax and M. El Naggari.

Lack of consistent data poses serious problem to the establishment of an adequate marketing information system. Private sector operators are somewhat frustrated with lack of adequate and reliable data and hope that this exercise will lead to the establishment of accurate and reliable data for a useful marketing information system. The assignment team decided that given the time constraint, it would not be possible to teach web page development to an individual at this time. Additional data will be gathered and analyzed and transformed into graphs and tables by Dr. Ariza-Nino. He will forward these graphs and tables to Dr. Adourn for their inclusion into the web frames while he is in Washington.

The assignment team contacted the Internet Service Provider (the Wayout.Net) to secure a space to host these web sites. These two sites will be hosted on the same initially but will be differentiated by separate links. They will be registered through two separate domain names and will web hosted separately at the end of the assignment and at the appropriate institution to be designated by the Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade

The assignment team discovered some inconsistencies in the various data. Rather than spending time to reconcile these differences, the team decided to compile readily available data and complete the web sites. These matters will be discussed with policy and decision makers to find suitable solutions.

Efforts from this consultancy are deployed in the construction of the two websites. The results of which are found through the two listed below. Viewers are advised to click on each link to review accomplishments to date. While these sites are not nearly complete, the team would make them available for viewing and solicit additional comments from viewers and potential users.

Please click here to go to [Cotton Website](#)

Please click here to go to [Rice Website](#)

These sites will be published on the World Wide Web. They are currently available for viewing at the APRP Web Site (www.agppolicy.com). Two links connect cotton and rice sites separately. Viewers can click to navigate to either site. These sites are not released yet and are posted for demonstration only.

Important note: These web site pages do not include meta-tags yet. Meta tags are html codes (key words) that are inserted into each page before a website is submitted to search engines. These codes allow meta-tagged sites to be located when individuals conduct searches on the Internet. Since we are still constructing these sites, we did not think it necessary to include tags yet but will do so when the sites are near completion and prior to submitting them to the Internet. Appropriate and useful links will be added later.

Summary and Conclusions

The assignment has provided us the opportunity to interact with various segments in both cotton and rice sectors.

While data on cotton were more readily available than data on rice, the assignment team made significant efforts to identify sources from which more reliable data could be obtained. The team found invaluable resources in the MVE Report, Wakalex and GOEIC.

The team presented its preliminary accomplishment on both web sites on Thursday, 22 February 2001. Reactions to preliminary results were positive and generated a lot of interest and useful comments.

The assignment team will seek additional data sources and may conduct analysis to reduce these variances identified in the data.

The assignment team found that private and public companies operating in both the cotton and rice sectors lack adequate training in information technology and electronic communications. As such it is extremely important to assess their needs and design training programs that teach how to access the Internet and use information that will be posted on both web sites. Both sites are currently uploaded and hosted on the APRP Website at <http://www.agpolicy.com>.

Recommendations

Some data are available and have already been converted into web materials and included in both sites. Additional efforts will be made to collect and analyze while the web developer is away. We propose the following steps during the next segment of the assignment and recommend that:

1. The assignment team continues to gather and analyze data on both cotton and rice.
2. Discuss inconsistencies in the data with various stakeholders and recommend steps to correct them.
3. Generate information and send them to Dr. Adoum to be converted into web publishing material to be included in the web sites. RDI Unit plans a Phase II to complete and expand this work.

Also under Phase II the following items will be implemented

4. Conduct a needs assessment and design a training program for Internet and electronic communication.
5. Discuss web sites ownership issues with Ministry of Economy and Foreign Trade
6. Provide training to project staff so they can carry out the analysis of additional data that would become available.
7. Identify and train project staff in simple manipulation and maintenance (to be done in the next phase)

The assignment team met with ALCOTEXA board members in Alexandria and presented them with the initial framework for cotton website. While members were enthusiastic about the website, their knowledge of the Internet appears to be limited. Further discussions with the ALCOTEXA MIS Manager confirmed this. As such it is extremely important to provide training to members of Alcotexa and ACC and appropriate ministries so they can become efficient users of these websites. We recommend the following to be undertaken in Phase II of this assignment:

1. Conduct a needs assessment to determine computer competency of members of ALCOTEXA and ACC.
2. Conduct a needs assessment to determine computer competency of ministry employees likely to interact with both websites
3. Design training programs.
4. Implement (with a co-trainer) these training programs in the next phase
5. Identify and train some individuals to carry out maintenance and upgrading of the sites.