

3rd Environmental Performance Review of Uzbekistan

July 15, 2021

Venue: The Presidential Academy of Public Administration

Talking points for the Minister of Agriculture under the agenda item: Food security and the Strategy for the Development of Agriculture for 2020-2030

- On behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, we would like to express our thanks for the performance review. We recognise many of the challenges highlighted in the findings.
- Many of these issues have also been identified as part of the preparatory work for the writing of the Agriculture Development Strategy (2020-2030), which was adopted in October 2019. This strategy commits the government and my Ministry to the development of more sustainable farming and agri-food systems.
- Whilst preparing the strategy, we were acutely aware of the importance of considering Uzbekistan's food security needs, both now and in the future.
- We also understood the critical need to take into account the current and future environmental costs of food production and to identify ways in which we could effectively address the significant challenges created by past sector policies which encouraged the production of cotton and wheat, without sufficient consideration of the significant environmental consequences on our lands, soils and water resources in many regions of the country.
- This is why we have recognised *Ensuring the rational use of natural resources and environmental protection* as one of the nine strategic priorities and pillars of our current strategy and reform programme;
- There is also a growing recognition, by the Government of Uzbekistan, of the importance of the 'Green economy' and the growing threat posed by the effects of climate change on our agriculture and food systems. And we are now actively engaged in turning these strategic priorities into practical actions.
- To give you some practical examples, one of the flagship reform actions which we have launched this year, is the establishment of an Uzbek Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation System, otherwise known as AKIS. We are in the very early days of launching this initiative. But our aim is to gradually develop a range of support services that can help to increase awareness, expand knowledge and promote innovation and demonstrate in real and practical ways how better farming and food production practices can also be environmentally sustainable and profitable.
- In 2020, by Presidential Decree (May 2020, #5995), the Ministry of Agriculture was also legally established as the officially authorized government body responsible for the management and promotion of organic farming and good agricultural practices. Our main focus is currently on defining the specific standards for organic production and certification, in line with internationally recognized practices.
- As part of this agenda, we are currently preparing a new Uzbekistan Code of Good Agricultural and Environmental Practices (GAEP). This is being guided by experience and knowledge of good and best global practices and know-how.
- In parallel, we are in the process of establishing pilot farm and agri-business advisory services in targeted regions. These advisers will be trained in new ad

modern agriculture practices and methods and will provide front line support services and support to our farmers.

- It is true, as recognised in the Report¹, that we have a very high use of fertilizers in Uzbekistan but it also recognises that organic fertilizers are also widely used in the country, with the volume (weight) of their consumption being 20 times higher than that of mineral fertilizers (figure 13.6 of the Report). Manure makes up a significant proportion of the organic fertilizers in use and it is an essential input for maintaining the soil fertility of irrigated lands. Our aim, as we expand farm support services, is to promote wider use of such sustainable practices, through improved knowledge and awareness, including the promotion of integrated pest management, thereby gradually reducing dependence on pesticides.
- We have recognized that our current systems are extremely fragmented and somewhat outdated and that we lack access to up-to-date knowledge, systems and technologies that can help drive the transformation and modernization of our agri-food system. Through AKIS and other related reform programmes, we are now actively engaged in responding to these challenges which we believe will directly contribute to the achievement of national SDG targets and help to gradually reduce the carbon footprint of the sector.
- To complement these on-going reform actions, we are also currently undertaking a detailed assessment of the impact of climate change on the agri-food sector. Results from this assessment will be ready by the end of this year and will provide us with updated forecasts of the future consequences of climate change on the sector and also provide us with more evidence-based guidance on targeted actions that can be taken to both adapt and mitigate against this growing threat.
- The example I have briefly outlined today are part of a growing agenda aimed at embracing the concerns raised in the performance review. We fully acknowledge that there is much to do, but we also believe that we are now on the right path to address many of these challenges which will ensure the future growth and sustainability of our rich natural resources and food systems.

¹ ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS UZBEKISTAN, Third Review. UNITED NATIONS Geneva, 2020.