

7,000 apple and cherry trees distributed to villages in Marrakech Province

Last month, the High Atlas Foundation, working in partnership with USAID, Morocco's Ministry of Waters and Forests, and the Marrakech 21 Foundation, distributed 7,000 apple and cherry trees to ten rural villages in the Marrakech Province. US Ambassador to Morocco Thomas Riley provided the funding and critical leadership to the project.

This initiative signifies American commitment to support communities that are affected by the recent Free Trade Agreement between the Kingdom of Morocco and the United States. The outcomes of this activity are expected to facilitate revenue and employment growth, strengthen civil society, leverage new commitments and funding, and serve as a catalyst to mobilize the rural community.



Fruit trees will provide an alternative source of income for small farmers, generating a more diverse income base, and conserving the natural resources of the area. For generations, these villages have depended largely on raising animals for food and income. The animals' grazing is destructive to the environment because it decimates local flora and causes severe erosion. In addition, the traditional crops of wheat and corn cannot meet the growing demands of the population. Fruit trees provide substantially more income, which will further integrate these communities into a cash economy, allowing them to more successfully meet their basic needs.

This project is the result of community members coming together with government representatives to determine the priority needs of the region. "It serves as a model for future cooperation between the government and the people they serve," said Jason Ben-Meir, President of the High Atlas Foundation. "Also, when the US supports fruit tree planting in Morocco and other Islamic countries, it builds trust and goodwill, which is so important at this critical time."

© 2005 Mena Report (www.menareport.com)