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## Creation of a network of qualified rural consultants

Within the initiative of Joint Programme targeted at creation of new income generation opportunities and promotion of improved agricultural practices, 26 dekhkans (small subsistence farmers) from three target areas, including Muynak, Shumanay and Kanlikul, were selected to form a network of agriculture extension agents (rural consultants) responsible for provision of consultancy services to rural population and solutions to the problems they might face in application of new agricultural practices. One of the main goals of training course was to improve the skills of the candidates in terms of provision of consultancy services and peer support to the rural population, dekhkans and farmers in target districts, particularly related to the creation of demonstration plots in the areas of cattle breeding, land management, fish farming, vegetable farming, aviculture, and beekeeping. The training was conducted by the specialists of KRASS (Khorezm Rural Advisory Support Service). Over the course of 5 days the participants learned best practices of running rural advisory services, particularly, received in-depth information on the methodology and key concepts of agro-consulting, as well as methods of problem solving, including identification and analysis. The rural consultants were also familiarized with the foundation of monitoring and evaluation and the cycle of problem solving. Additionally, in order to ensure successful communication of consultants with the target audience, the trainers provided information on communication methods and principals of client relationship management, and group work. Due to the consequences of the environmental crisis in Aral Sea region such as poor soil conditions, intensive desertification and land degradation, the farmers and dekhkans often face a plenty of problems. Therefore, the Joint Programme created a network of rural consultants to provide the farmers and dekhkans a continuous support and promote application of improved and sustainable agricultural practices. It is important to note, that this is a continuation of the initiative undertaken in 2012, when 24 agriculture extension agents were selected. They have currently developed 25 business plans related to various areas of agriculture.

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