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UN agency takes aim at two birds with one stone – poverty and global warming



Maryam Jurakulova of Tajikistan with a fruit tree seedling she received from WFP

7 April 2010 – In a novel track in the battle against global warming, the United Nations World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) has given 800 poor families in Tajikistan thousands of seedlings to plant not only to provide fruit, but to offset the carbon footprint of vehicles used in the agency's food aid work.

Some 63,000 fruit, nut and pine trees are currently taking root in the Central Asian country thanks to \$100,000 provided by WFP's vehicle-leasing department in Dubai, as part of what the agency calls "unique climate-change project."

In a series of villages in the west along the border with Uzbekistan, WFP has given 800 vulnerable families 40 trees apiece – apricot, pomegranate, cherry, mulberry, almond, pistachio and pine.

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The families will also get WFP food while they receive training in looking after the trees. In three years, when the trees become productive, the families will have ample supplies of fruit for the first time in their lives with enough left over to sell at the market. At the same time the trees will help to absorb the equivalent amount of carbon emissions from WFP vehicles.

In the eastern Rasht Valley, WFP is partnering with the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) in 50 secondary schools in a learning and environmental awareness programme. Some 10,000 secondary students have been given one tree each – apricot, apple or poplar – which is marked with a plaque bearing their name. They are responsible for making the tree grow, and in doing so, learn about the role of trees in preventing soil erosion.

Tajikistan's Forestry Agency is collaborating in the project, designating staff to train the beneficiaries, providing technical assistance from maps and reports going back 50 years, assigning a forest ranger to patrol the pistachio seedlings on horseback, and signing a 20-year land lease with the new tree-owners for just \$1 a year.

One beneficiary, Ilmira Jaffarov, sees the project is a dream come true. To buy one fruit tree at the market would cost her family several weeks' savings. Now they have 43 saplings growing in their small garden, even if they have to wait three to four years for the trees to give fruit.

"These trees are our future" Ms. Jaffarov, 50, says. "Even if they don't give us fruit now, they will remain here even for our children to enjoy."

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