



PRESS RELEASE



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• ESTIMATED POPPY CULTIVATION IN AFGHANISTAN

(Washington, D.C.)—The annual U.S. Government estimate for opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is complete and shows that approximately 107,400 hectares of poppy were cultivated during the crop season in 2005—a decline of 48 percent over the 2004 level.

The drop in poppy planting was widespread, including reductions in 19 of Afghanistan's 26 poppy growing provinces. The reduction in cultivation is attributable to several factors including voluntary restraint by farmers.

Current cultivation levels equate to a potential production of 4,475 metric tons of opium, a 10 percent decrease in potential production over 2004 estimates. Favorable growing conditions are the principal reason why the percentage decrease for potential production is not proportional to the decrease in cultivation.

These estimates are based on a scientific sample survey of Afghan agricultural regions conducted with specialized U.S. Government satellite imaging systems.

"The news that poppy cultivation has been cut in half is welcome indeed," said John Walters, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). "Continued reductions will be needed to reduce Afghanistan's drug trade to a level where it does not pose a threat to that nation's internal stability."

"Even with these significant reductions in poppy cultivation, the overall scope of the drug threat in Afghanistan remains unacceptably high. Building on these results will continue to require enormous political and administrative efforts, which we support. We look forward to working with the Government of Afghanistan to strengthen its ability to combat this dangerous threat," Walters said.

The United States is working closely with the United Kingdom, which is the lead nation coordinating international counternarcotics assistance to the Afghan Government. The United States will do its part to help by giving Afghan farmers real economic alternatives, supporting the Afghan central government and governors to discourage cultivation and eradicate poppy fields, working side-by-side with the Afghans to strengthen their drug law enforcement, and helping them to establish interdiction programs. The United States Government is also working with our Afghan counterparts to build civic institutions and raise public awareness about the serious harm drugs inflict.

Summary of Key Findings: Poppy cultivation for 2005 was estimated at 107,400 hectares, compared with 206,700 hectares in 2004, 61,000 in 2003;

30,750 in 2002; 1,685 in 2001; 64,510 in 2000; and 51,500 in 1999.

Potential opium production for 2005 was estimated at 4,475 metric tons, the equivalent of approximately 526 metric tons of potential heroin production, if all were processed.

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