

PNW wheat to fight hunger in Yemen

The U.S. Agency for International Development has purchased 200,000 tons of Northwest wheat that will be sent to Yemen, where citizens are facing the largest food security emergency in the world.

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Stephen Anderson, Yemen country director for the World Food Organization, speaks at a press conference Friday in Portland, where Pacific Northwest wheat is being donated to fight hunger in the war-torn country.

Seven ships loaded with soft white wheat grown in the Pacific Northwest are bound for Yemen in the Middle East to feed millions of people on the brink of famine in the war-torn country.

The U.S. Agency for International Development, or USAID, purchased roughly 200,000 tons of wheat — enough to feed 7 million people in Yemen for two months — and is working with the United Nations World Food Program to distribute the shipments.

Officials gathered for a press conference Friday outside the historic Albers Mill in Portland to announce the humanitarian mission. Stephen Anderson, Yemen country leader for the World Food Program, said the wheat will provide much-needed relief to the country, where nearly 18 million people require emergency food assistance, according to the UN.

“We’re doing our best to get food assistance to those people who need it most,” Anderson said. “The situation in Yemen unfortunately does not show signs of improvement right now.”

Yemen has been mired in conflict since 2015 between the country’s government, backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, and Houthi separatists. The republic, which imports 90 percent of its food, is now suffering the world’s largest food security emergency.

USAID has spent more than \$550 million on emergency food assistance in Yemen since the beginning of fiscal year 2017, sending U.S. wheat, peas, vegetable oil and food vouchers to UN agencies and non-governmental organizations fighting hunger overseas.

Anderson, with the World Food Program, said the situation on the ground in Yemen is complex, but with support from U.S. farmers, they are getting aid to between 6-7 million people every month.

“I think today we’re forming a partnership to help fight hunger together,” Anderson said.

Darren Padgett, a wheat farmer in Grass Valley, Ore., and a member of the Oregon Wheat Commission, was on hand for Friday’s event. He said growers take pride in knowing they are helping to feed the world, especially in areas where food is scarce.

“It’s what we do, is feed people” Padgett said. “To see it going to people who are truly in need, it makes you feel good, and gives you another reason to get up in the morning and go to work.”

Oregon farmers grow up to 75 million bushels of mostly soft white wheat per year. About 85-90 percent of the crop is shipped overseas.

Rep. Mike McLane, Oregon House Republican Leader and a lieutenant colonel in the Air National Guard, grew up in surrounded by wheat fields in Condon. He said he is proud of U.S. humanitarian efforts and pleased that Oregon wheat is doing its part.

“If you are blessed with bounty, you should share it,” McLane said. “And we here in Oregon are blessed with bounty.”

Finally, Mohamed Alyajouri, a first-generation immigrant from Yemen, spoke about the need for emergency relief back in his home country, where many of his family members still remain.

Alyajouri, who works as a health care administrator for Oregon Health and Science University, came to the U.S. when he was 10 years old. He is the first Yemeni-American elected to public office in Oregon, serving on the Portland Community College Board of Trustees.

Though Oregon is now home, Alyajouri said Yemen will forever be in his heart. He said he was “overjoyed” to hear local wheat was on its way to assist the Yemeni people.

“I’m excited for the future and opportunities to build many more bridges between Oregon and Yemen,” he said.

