



An Afghan woman picks saffron flowers in a field

# Growing the Red gold

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An Afghan worker sorts harvested saffron flowers in a field on the outskirts of Herat province



Afghan workers separate saffron threads from harvested flowers at a processing centre in Herat province

## ● Afghanistan saffron production hits 13 tonnes this year

AFP | Herat, Afghanistan

Starting before dawn has even broken, Afghanistan's army of saffron pickers shift their way across sun-baked fields to pluck brightly the coloured crocuses that are providing the country's farmers with a new means of income.

The delicate pistil of the flower has for centuries been used in cooking around the world and because of its relatively high price has been dubbed “red gold” by those who rely on its cultivation.

Joma Khan is one of the 156,000 seasonal workers who help harvest the spice, earning about \$1 an hour.

“We start our field work before sunrise and each of us can collect about four to five kilograms of saffron flower,” the 16-year-old said.

The harvest is then sent to factories where gloved workers remove the red pistil, made up of the three stigma that when dried constitute the spice.

Authorities struggling to wean farmers off the highly profitable opium poppy trade are hoping to use the spice as an attractive alternative.

And the results are looking positive, thanks to billions of dollars of international aid.

The saffron harvest hit 13 tonnes this year, compared with a tonne in 2013, according to



Afghan women harvest saffron flowers in a field



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agriculture ministry spokesman Akbar Rostami.

Cultivation requires little water, meaning it has not been heavily impacted by the historic drought currently threatening

nearly three million Afghans with famine.

It has even intensified in some drought-hit areas, especially in the northwestern province of Herat on the border with Iran and Turkmenistan.

Official figures show saffron cultivation has increased to 6,200 hectares of land in 2018, up 21 percent on last year.

However, there is still a way to go, with 263,000 hectares currently given over to poppy production. And while the saffron sector generated \$35 billion in 2017, opium made an incredible \$1.4 billion.

Iran remains the world's largest saffron producer, capturing nearly 90 percent of the global market with 400 tonnes annually. Meanwhile, nearly 90 percent of the opium harvested on the planet still comes from Afghanistan.

Prices for the spice have also fallen, from more than \$900 at the start of the year to \$660 now, due in part to mafias who illegally import Iranian saffron and flood the market, Rostami said.

Nevertheless, the increased cultivation of the spice is being seen as a positive sign.

The spice is being exported to 17 countries through new air corridors, mainly to China, India, and the Gulf countries, and to a lesser extent to the European Union and North America, says the agriculture ministry.

“Afghanistan's saffron, based on its organic nature, it is better than other saffron in the world,” claimed Abdul Shukoor Ahhari, director of Tila-e-Surkh Afghan (“Afghan Red Gold”), one of the country's main processing sites.

## Mumtalakat honours outstanding employees across the group



Officials and award winners posing for a group photo

TDT | Manama

Bahrain Mumtalakat Holding Company (Mumtalakat), the sovereign wealth fund of the Kingdom of Bahrain, hosted a special luncheon yesterday for its outstanding employees across its portfolio companies on the occasion of

Bahrain's National Day. As an employer of approximately 14,000 employees across 30 companies in Bahrain, and a key contributor to the local economy, Mumtalakat launched an annual awards programme in 2017 to recognise the employees of excellence within the Group in line with its mission as a holding company.

Commenting, Mahmood H. Alkooheji, Chief Executive Officer of Mumtalakat said, “Our ‘Many Stories, One Bahrain’ initiative provided us with the opportunity to honour and thank our outstanding employees and highlight their accomplishments as we remain committed to attracting the strongest talents.”

### Awardees

1. Ahmed Abdulghani from the National Bank of Bahrain
2. Ahmed Abdulla Ahmed from Arab Shipbuilding & Repair Yard Company (ASRY)
3. Ahmed Mohd Shukri from Aluminium Bahrain
4. Ahmed Shaikh from Southern Tourism Company
5. Adel Daylami from Batelco
6. Ali Al Hannan from Alba
7. Ayman Mohamed Buheji from Bahrain Real Estate Investment (Edamah)
8. Budoor Hasan Al Rasheed from Gulf Air
9. Fatima Makhloq from Bahrain Institute for Pearls and Gemstones (DANAT)
10. Fayezy Ramzy Fayezy from BIC
11. Hiba Mohammed Al-Hallaq from Gulf International Bank
12. Hussain Alawainati from Gulf Aviation Academy
13. Kamal Mansoor Al Shakar from Durrat Khaleej Al Bahrain