

*Serving the people of Armenia and Artsakh since 1989*

## Looking Back... Moving Forward



SERVING THE PEOPLE OF ARMENIA

What motivates a 69 or a 70-year-old grandparent to be on the road in Armenia past midnight? What really motivates these fine gentlemen who are ready for retirement, but, like us, to volunteer their time and services?

I asked these questions to myself and shared them with my ATG colleagues of over 25 years, our country director Gagik Mkrchyan and chief agronomist Mekhitar Grigoryan, while the three of us were returning to Yerevan from the Tavush region after one of our wheat seed field evaluation trips.

We were driving on the main narrow and dangerous one-lane highway, where road marks are almost nonexistent. Particularly at night, the shoulder lines and the dividing lines were not visible at all.

The heavy cargo trucks dominating the center of the roads were a safety hazard. Gagik, a diabetic, was having a hard time avoiding the headlights from the incoming traffic, which was literally making driving almost impossible. I felt uncomfortable every time our small, aging vehicle shifted to the very far edge of the road, where nothing could be seen! Like a back-seat driver, my hands instantly would reach out to the steering-wheel in an attempt to re-direct the vehicle.

I couldn't help myself to recall an incident that took place some 22 years ago, in 1997 when then board members Dr. Art Hazarabedian, Dr. Leon Garoyan, George Lelegian and I arrived near Sos village, in Martuni region of Artsakh in an old decaying van from the Soviet Era. A senior government officer remarked "Why don't you commute with a jeep (as they refer to the SUVs)? You are American and need to show prosperity and success, so our villagers desire to have the same?!" To which Dr. Hazarabedian replied, "We are here to help improve the living conditions of the people; not for our own comfort."

Gagik and Mekhitar have seen it all; the collapse of the system, the changing guards, dealing with at least 12 Ministers of Agriculture, (when there was such a department), and the ever-changing staff, who generally lack the appreciation of having a seed bank reserve for securing the country's food supply. There is a lack of understanding of the applied science methodology of high-quality seed propagation for each of the seven growing zones in Armenia. It has become more difficult to recruit younger people into the farming industry; they prefer quicker and easier ways of making a living, and hence are in search of better opportunities. Irrigation has become unaffordable to many growers, who have yet to see a farmer-friendly water distribution system implemented by their government.

Thanks to you, our donors, over the years, few times we were able to save the people from potential famine. However, here we are in our 30th year of operation, where so much has been changed, and yet so much more remains to be improved. What disturbs us most is the lack of institutional approach to carry out this vitally important mission of securing the country with their domestic seed supply. This provides us with no other alternative then only to take the matter into our own hands and rebuild the seed bank reserve, with your help, once again, on our own.

With heartfelt appreciation for your kindness,  
**Varoujan Der Simonian,**  
*Executive Director, ATG*



# BUILDING the Health Care CAPACITY of Livestock Industry

This year, the 30th Anniversary of the A.T.G.'s service to the people of Armenia and Artsakh, the ATG Board of Directors is pleased to inform you, our supporters, that Armenia's agricultural sector has the capability to address the health needs of its livestock industry.

Armenia is now equipped with a Central Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (CVDL) headquartered in Avan, adjacent to Yerevan, as well as Portable Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratories (PVDL) stationed in five major cattle-concentrated areas in the country, namely Lori, Tavush, Geghargounik, Aragadzoden and Sissian regions. The CVDL was funded and built by United States Government agencies, whereas the PVDL's, were initiated and provided by the Fresno, California-based A. T. G., Inc. funded by you, USA based generous donors.

The CVDL is responsible for the overall containment of zoonotic and other animal-borne transmissible diseases, such as Anthrax, Brucellosis, Bird Flu, Rabies, Foot and Mouth diseases. Whereas the PVDLs that are stationed at the five Regional Veterinary Service Centers compliment the vital role carried out by the CVDL, providing on-farm and on-site rapid diagnosis to the livestock industry wherever they might be, at farms, in the fields, or, during summer-time, while the animals are grazing there, in the mountains, thereby helping prevent the loss of farm animals and subsequently farm income.

The PVDLs are easy to transport, they do not require any special transportation method; they could be placed in any vehicle and carried to a site where the health of a cattle requires immediate attention.

Within a short period of time, a designated veterinarian with PVDL in possession, could arrive and quickly diagnose the health condition of a farm animal anywhere in Armenia. This rapid response time is crucial in containing a potential spread of animal-borne diseases to other animals and humans, preventing, at the same time, probable loss to the farmer.

"We thank you for your invaluable contribution to this very important sector. I appreciate our partnership with the A.T.G. The PVDLs are extremely effective; they considerably improved our capabilities to diagnose and better serve the animal health industry," stated Dr. Perch Tumanyan of the CVDL, "and if necessary, we carry out follow-up tests here, at our central laboratories."

"We would appreciate, if A.T.G. can continue supplying the PVDLs and the related consumables elements for our annual needs in the field," Dr. Tumanian requested. Dr. Reynolds replied, "I am pleased that we were able to complete one of the objectives that our founding chairman, Dr. Arthur O. Hazarabedian, D.V.M., along with fellow colleagues and board members Bob Bushnell, D.V.M. and Jack Mores, D.V.M. wanted to see accomplished. A fellow veterinarian and once a senior colleague of our profession, we have dedicated this PVDL in his memory – for his devotion to the advancement of veterinary medicine in the United States, and to the service of the people of Armenia and humanity."



Dr. James P. Reynolds, with Garik Degoyan, head of Kavar Regional Veterinary Services, who was excited to take possession of the latest PVDL. "I have been anxiously waiting to have received this amazing package since I first saw it demonstrated a few years ago. We never had such flexibility and efficacy in our hands. This will be very useful to us; we can reach the farmers and provide fast service to their animal health concerns, no matter where they might be located," stated Degoyan.

"We believe these portable laboratories present the opportunity to significantly enhance the veterinary diagnostic capabilities of the livestock industry in Armenia." said Dr. Reynolds.

The A.T.G. Varoujan Der Simonian, ATG's Executive Director, amplified, "The A.T.G. Board of Directors would like to uphold the legacy of Dr. Arthur Hazarabedian, as well as his colleagues Bob Bushnell and Jack Mores. In this regard, we humbly ask for contributions, so that we may continuously re-supply the PVDL's with enough consumables to suffice year-around. Helping the livestock industry to prosper will, after all, also encourage rural communities to stay in their villages."

# Food Security in the Landlocked Country of Armenia

*"Pity the nation that is full of beliefs and empty of religion. Pity the nation that wears a cloth it does not weave and eats a bread it does not harvest." — Khalil Gibran, The Garden of The Prophet*

During the past three decades you, our sponsors, enabled the Armenian Technology Group, Inc. (A.T.G.) to transfer knowledge and technology that enabled Armenia's farmers to become self-reliant and efficient growers. With your help, we assisted them in cultivating their lands, increasing their productivity, putting bread on their tables and helping to provide for their families. Substantial achievements were recorded over the years.

Currently, nevertheless, farmers continue to face economic difficulties. They are 1) unable to afford to invest in farm equipment to cultivate their small parcels of farmland to maximize their farming operations, 2) often forced to not plough their land due to the rising cost of irrigation and 3) faced with a shortage of farm labor, since younger generations are now less interested in farming.

On this, the 30th anniversary of serving the people of Armenia, A.T.G. has adopted a new approach to assisting the growers. We will try to help them overcome challenges by providing them turnkey farming services, from land leveling to planting, harvesting and processing. The potential benefits of such turnkey services should be fivefold:



1. Save growers from spending their limited resources on farm equipment-for private individual farmland.
2. Help growers utilize agriculturally more advanced No-Till planting methodology, thereby reducing irrigation costs to the farmers by some 25% and soil erosion by up to 95%;
3. Save farmers the expense of maintaining their farm equipment and other planting costs by up to 65%;
4. Instruct growers to follow agronomically efficient methods to ensure a clean crop harvest, one free of undesirable elements; [A.T.G.'s methodical operation of a combine would include, for example, thorough vacuuming of the combine, before moving it on to another field, thereby ensuring a clean harvest.]
5. Include the services of the Seed Inspection and Quality Control Department, to ensure the growers can obtain certification of their harvest. Certification would enable them to market clearly identified seed varieties to other grain growers, which would help secure higher price for their crops.

## MODELED AFTER THE GREEN REVOLUTION OF INDIA

The support of U.S. Government entities was substantial during the past years. With such help, in 1995, world experts in wheat seed production Dr. Warren Kronstad, Dr. Curt De Louche, and Dr. Richard Newberg, who made significant contributions to India's Green Revolution – were able to draft a strategic map for A.T.G. Thereby helping Armenia to increase wheat production. One of the key components of the map ensured the sustainability of a program. This meant being able to propagate the breeder seed in consecutive years, thereby creating a germinating foundation that could be registered and certified. This, in turn, would result in a common seed that made possible, later, a harvest by grain growers that could, again, be sown, for subsequent harvesting, milling or general consumption.

## Building the Foundation from the Ground Up

It cannot be stressed often enough that, for a landlocked country like Armenia, food security is an integral part of national security. Again, this vital issue becomes more apparent, when Armenia's geo-economic situation is taken into account. Dependence on other countries for grain to feed its own people makes Armenia much more vulnerable while affecting, at the same time, its overall economic and political bargaining strength.

Reflecting on 30 years of service to the people of Armenia, Mr. Der Simonian said, "We give homage to all the A.T.G. board members and technical advisors -- Dr. Arthur Hazarabedian, D.V.M., Dr. Robert Bushnell, Dr. Leon Garoyan, Don Tounjes, Monte Bell, Roger Benton and Mekhitar Grigoryan, who planted the first wheat and alfalfa seed fields and trial plots near the epicenter of the earthquake-devastated city of Spitak."

Early on, as the seed project evolved with technical advisors James Boudier, Ph.D., Mark Goodson and Roger Culver joining the group, A.T.G. embarked on an applied science methodology by setting up trial plots in seven growing zones in Armenia and Artsakh. The organization took it upon itself to carry out a continuing Research & Development process. The US Government was a major contributor to this undertaking.



Melik Manoucharian, Varoujan DerSimonian and Mekhitar Grigoryan in Tavush

Over the past 30 year 496 seed varieties were tested on trial plots. More than 295 training seminars and field demonstrations were conducted in over 320 villages. As Mr. Grigoryan, who fondly remembered working with the founding members in planting the first fields, once stated long ago -- "We follow the process by conducting extensive trials of varieties over a two year period. We carry all the risks, and only after ensuring the best seed varieties -- varieties suitable for producing the best results in a given region -- only then do we make the seeds available to Seed Producing Association members."

## POTENTIAL OUTCOME and SEED BANK

In sum, the potential outcome of turnkey farming services to grain growers would result in higher output, better income, and more importantly, a desirable Seed Bank reserve. As more focus will, inevitably, be devoted to the IT sector and, therewith, more intensive farming operations, the need to secure Armenia's grain consumption demands will not diminish. Rather, in the volatile region of Armenia, demands will grow and be felt immediately, should any crisis place the country and its population in a vulnerable situation.

Creating a Seed Bank is a vitally important component of establishing sustainable domestic seed production, one that would meet local climatic requirements and planting needs. Over the past two decades, A.T.G. built a seed inventory reserve. However, several times, due to seed shortage or drought, the Group distributed its seed supplies to the growers to sow on their farms. Currently, A.T.G. is, again, in the process of re-building Armenia's Seed Bank -- with locally generated seed!



Mekhitar Grigoryan, ATG chief agronomist, studying characteristics of one of the wheat varieties being tested in Varakavan, Tavush (May, 2019).

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P.O. Box 5969 Fresno, CA 93755  
550 E. Shaw Ave., Fresno, CA 93710  
Tel: 559.224.1000  
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# Launching ART-HAZAR A.T.G. 30th Anniversary Gift to the Farmers

On this, the 30th anniversary of our founding, A.T.G. office in Armenia officially registered our latest high yielding, high quality wheat seed variety with Armenia's Plant and Seed Inspection and Quality Control Service. The seed was bestowed the name ART-HAZAR, in memory of the founding chairman of the group, Dr. Arthur O. Hazarabedian, D.V.M.

The selection of the seed is the result of years of research during which A.T.G.'s staff in Armenia set up trial plots in numerous locations throughout Armenia. The idea was to ensure that each wheat seed variety was suitable for planting in the various growing or climate zones of Armenia and, most importantly, would secure larger quantities of harvest per acre, while generating higher incomes for the growers.

"This is simply our gesture to express our gratitude to Dr. Hazarabedian and his group who, despite having their own different professions, focused their attention on the most vulnerable segment of our economy," stated the originator of the seed-naming concept, Gagik Mkerchyan, director of the A.T.G. Foundation in Armenia, who was spearheading the project. "The aims that Dr. Hazarabedian initiated in Armenia, during the early years of independence, saved thousands of lives, to say the least. They continue to inspire the rebuilding of the country's Seed Bank," Mkerchyan added.

"We now germinate the seed in our country and supply local grain growers with the highest quality seed available for Armenia's climate. Needless to say, over the years we experimented with some 496 seed varieties, several of which already have been registered and start with A.T.G. acronyms. These are in circulation but, certainly, we had to select the best seed for the legacy of Dr. Hazarabedian," said Mekhitar Grigoryan, head agronomist of the group.



*Gagik Mkrtychyan*

"This is a homage to the vision that Art and his colleagues had for the people of Armenia. By sharing ART-HAZAR wheat seed with the grain growers we are spreading Art's spirit and hope in Armenia's heartland. We congratulate our staff for their dedication in continuing the organization's mission," said Varoujan Der Simonian, Executive Director of A.T.G.



"With the official registration of the new ART-HAZAR wheat seed variety, we are pleased to report, the independent quasi-government body of Seed Inspection and Quality Control Service that we initiated in 2002 is functioning! This ensures that industry standards continue to be met -- standards, by which grain growers would be offered quality seeds suitable for planting in their growing zones. Once our office makes the new variety available to the local grain growers, we anticipate it will generate higher production yield and increase farm family income," said Dr. James Reynolds, President of A.T.G.



With his HH Karekin I, Catholicos of All Armenians, AJ Hazarabedian, Dr. Arthur Hazarabedian, and Varoujan Der Simonian, ATG funded the renovation of a greenhouse at St. Etchmiadzin complex (1995).



Dr. James P. Reynolds, Dr. Jack Mores, Leon Garoyan, Ph.D., Dr. Art Hazarabedian, Dr. Benie Osburn, Dr. Robert Bushnell, Doctors in Veterinary Medicine and fellow ATG board members planning Animal Health / Public Health in Armenia, now known as One Health Initiative (UC Davis, 1994).



Dr. Art Hazarabedian, ATG Chairmen of the Board with Monte Bell, Roger Benton and Roger Culver, they were joined with Dr. James Bowder and Mark Goodson from East Coast, to undertake the wheat seed project (1994).



Board members, Dr. Nubert Baker with Sarkis Sahatdjian, prior to shipping 22nd container of medical supplies to Armenia (Madera, 1998).



Board members Paul Khasigian, Ph.D. and Sarkis Sarabian preparing the shipment of fruit tree cuttings to Armenia and Artsakh (Sanger, 2002).



Varoujan Der Simonian with Ron Khachigian, then President in the process of forwarding 5,400 phylloxera resistant grape rootstocks to Artsakh. Courtesy of Luther Khachigian (Visalia, 1999).



Roger Benton and Varoujan Der Simonian at ATG initiated and funded 70 acres of land reclamation project to clear the soil from alkaline, converting to productive farmland (Sis refugee village, Ararat Valley, 2002).



Vladimir Zakiyan and Alan Asadoorian with at ATG grape nursery in Artsakh. The nursery created jobs for 53 families year round; help rebuilt their livelihood, and rejuvenated some 4,000 acres of vineyards in the region.



Hagop Tookolian, MD, Nubar Tashjian, JD, and Rose Khachadoorian, Ph.D., expert in pesticide handling and safety practices, during an ATG Board of Director's meeting at the home of Margit Hazarabedian, PhD., Corporate Secretary.



Then Artsakh PM Jerayr Pogosian flanked with Victor Sahatdjian and Varoujan Der Simonian. ATG established 200 acres phylloxera free grape nursery in Artsakh (April, 1999).



With the financial support of the US Government, ATG contracted local craftsmen to manufacture 12,000 beehives in Artsakh and distributed them to families in the regions (Gandzasar, 2001).



Gagik Mkerchyan and Mkhitar Grigoryan in a remote area, at one of the 14 seed trial plots of the seven growing zones in Armenia that they carry out Applied Science methodology, annually since 1992.