

An Oklahoma Army National Guard agricultural team now in Afghanistan is reaching out to the local population by helping to set up a youth sports program. The Guard's 2-45th Agribusiness Development Team (ADT) arrived in Afghanistan in October to help that nation redevelop its agricultural industry from top to bottom. However, another element of its mission is to help win the hearts and minds of Afghans. The unit moved in that direction recently when it conducted a joint operation at Gardez in Paktya Province to discuss with local officials which sports programs would be needed and what equipment and support would be required. The ADT worked with the Paktya Provincial Reconstruction Team headed by U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Marchal Magee of Issaquah, Wash., who saw a need for youth sports programs for the region. Officials noted the programs are important because they allow women to become more involved and permit them to assert their roles in Afghan society. Afghan women are now playing a more important role in the new government than what was permitted under the Taliban, officials said. Helping that aspect along is Chief Warrant Officer Jill Graham of Tahlequah, administrative officer for the 2-45th ADT. "My role was to assist and form part of the joint female empowerment team to provide key leadership advice on matters dealing with the Afghan women," Graham said. The 2-45th ADT is made up of about 60 troops, half of whom are knowledgeable in many aspects of agriculture, including farming, livestock and poultry production, food processing, veterinary medicine and developing water sources. The other half of the ADT is made up of a security force, which in the last few days was helping pave the way for a visit by Karl Eikenberry, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan. "The ADT was tasked with providing convoy and security operations" for Eikenberry's visit, according to Capt. Kale Rogers of Cordell, the security force's commander. Eikenberry is traveling across Afghanistan to determine the progress the United States has made during the past 18 months since he was appointed ambassador. Part of the ambassador's itinerary included a tour of Gardez and a stop at Paktya University, where the 2-45th ADT was

responsible for securing the university grounds for the visit and showcasing the improvements that have been made at the school. "The mission is crucial to showing the good that the U.S. has been able to accomplish over the past few years that the ADTs have existed," said Col. Robert Roshell of Lawton, the 2-45th's commander. "Ambassador Eikenberry's visit brings an increased visibility to exactly what can be accomplished, and help in revitalizing the Afghan agriculture in the province," Roshell said. More than a dozen other state National Guards have agribusiness development teams working across Afghanistan. The 2-45th ADT took over on Oct. 13 from Oklahoma's 1-45th ADT, the state's first agricultural team to go to Afghanistan. The event marked the first time one Oklahoma National Guard unit has replaced another one of its own. Manny Gamallo 581-8386 manny.gamallo@tulsaworld.com SUBHEAD: Men are working on a sports program for Afghan youth. Original Print Headline: Guard unit expands its mission