Kabul, Afghanistan – The Afghanistan PEACE Project, short for Pastoral Engagement, Adaptation and Capacity Enhancement, is a USAID-funded project aimed at facilitating the Government of Afghanistan’s efforts to improve livestock production and range management. Two programs will be implemented in Afghanistan over the 4-year course of the project: a Livestock Early Warning System (LEWS) program and Near-Infrared Reflectance Spectroscopy (NIRS) program. These programs are being implemented within the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Land (MAIL). The implementing partners include UC Davis and Texas A&M University with funding provided by USAID.

NIRS technology allows an analyst to determine the quality of forage that an animal is eating whether it comes from Afghanistan’s rangelands or as a supplement. The PEACE Project will be establishing a NIRS lab at the MAIL Department of Animal Health and Husbandry facility in 2008. As an introduction to the NIRS program, two Afghan delegates were invited to meet with Texas A&M University staff in the United States in July 2007, to see the University’s NIRS lab and to learn how the program works in the United States. The introduction took place at College Station, Texas, in collaboration with Dr. Robert Smith and support from the USDA PASA program. The Afghan team consisted of Dr. Azizullah Osmani, Director of Animal Health and Husbandry under the MAIL; Dr Said Gul Safi, President of the Afghanistan Veterinary Association; Dr. Michael Jacobs and Dr. Catherine Schloeder, Afghanistan PEACE Project; and Dr. Doug Tolleson, Kris Banik and Stephen Prince from the TAMU NIRS lab.

During the introduction, the visitors had the opportunity to review the entire process for obtaining results from fecal and forage samples, using samples obtained from different animals and rangelands around Texas. The visitors were also introduced to the application of NIRS technology for other purposes, including evaluating the quality of wool. At the end of the visit, Dr. Osmani spoke of the importance of this new technology to Afghanistan, particularly in light of how dependant Afghanistan’s economy is on animal products. He also extended his thanks on behalf of the Islamic Government of Afghanistan, MAIL, to USAID, UC Davis and TAMU, for making this technology available to Afghanistan.