

**Interview> Afghan Soybean Doctor Steven Kwon refers**  
**“Are you going to give up the Mineral-abundance**  
**nation?”**

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**“China is thriving to monopolize the abundant mineral resources in Afghanistan....Korea must also enter Afghanistan”**

**The soybean cultivation has expanded due to Korea’s support....“Open a path for exporting agricultural tools”**

(Yeonhap News, Seoul) “In Afghanistan, mineral resources such as lithium and rare earth resources etc are buried abundantly. Currently, China is putting a lot of effort to Afghanistan to monopolize the resources. Korea needs to also enter Afghanistan soonest possible.”

NEI (Nutrition & Education International) is an NGO based in Los Angeles, USA and the president is Kwon, Soon Young (American name Steven Kwon (69) who is Korean-American) is called "Doctor Soybean" in Afghanistan. The above was the first thing he stated instead of soybean, at a café in Seoul on 27<sup>th</sup>.

Lithium is a crucial raw material for producing secondary cell such as laptops, mobile phones and battery cars. Rare earth resources are rare minerals, also titled "Vitamin of Industries" and "Rice of High -technology Industry".

There is a reason why Dr. Kwon had first mentioned about the mineral resources instead of soybean, which had changed field of poppies to field of soybean since 2003 in Afghanistan. While the Government of Korea is stating Afghanistan as "Travel banned-country" for danger of terror and poor security situation, he was anxious that Korea will lose its competition on mineral resources in Afghanistan.

He visited to Seoul from 58<sup>th</sup> Afghanistan trip and referred that "Currently, there are no Korean nationality in the country other than people from Korean Embassy in Afghanistan". And stated "Government of Korea should take off Afghanistan from "Travel-banned country" and enter Afghanistan's mineral resources competition."

He added by emphasizing "If it is hard to lift the ban to the public, it should at least issue Commercial Visa so the country can secure mineral resources and export industrial tools that Afghanistan needs."

Dr. Kwon's suggestion had naturally led to "Soybean" section with the concern of the county.

He referred that the production of soybean is increasing, while the agricultural tool is merely available in Afghanistan and appealed that "The government of Korea should consider exporting various types of agricultural tools and machines made from Korea."

During his visit to Afghanistan, he looked around Afghanistan's first Sterilized Soymilk Plant, which is under construction and participated at the Soybean Association in Afghanistan.

Moreover, people from parliament, Chamber of Commerce & Industry, pediatrician, private sector gathered to discuss how to produce 50,000MT of soybean in 2019 and distributed 30 tractors to numerous Soybean Farmers Associations in various provinces.

Population of Afghanistan is 3,182 million and the proportion of the farming population is 85%. Dr. Kwon has worked in Afghanistan for 13 years and nowadays farmers are cultivating soybean in 31 provinces (166 districts, 25,000 villages) among 34 provinces, excluding 3 provinces which is under Taliban administration.

There are seven soy processing factories including roasted soybean, soy flour and Afghanistan first sterilized soymilk factory, soy oil and TSP factory. Soybean cultivation, processing, production in Afghanistan is solely due to Dr. Kwon. He worked at global food company Nestle in 1986 and was responsible to develop alternative milk powder for infants and medical food. He established NEI with his own expenses after witnessing Afghanistan situation that had poor food security in 2003.

His perspective is that malnutrition is due to lack of protein and in order to save women and children in Afghanistan, it needs soybean as a protein source. People of Afghanistan had no special resistance when Dr. Kwon had first introduced soybean and trained the farmer method of soy cultivation and soy processing. Field of poppies started to change to soybean field. Dr. Kwon took early retirement and went back and forth to Afghanistan and US for soy cultivation, training, establishing soy processing factory etc.

The Government of Korea awarded Dr. Kwon Korea's Medal of Honor in 2013 due to his achievements. Also, to support his project, World Food Programme (WFP) had granted 25 billion Korea Won. The project will complete in November 2017 and will produce 6,000 MT annually.

"Producing 6,000MT annually with the support of Korea (using Korean soybean) casts a long shadow. Broadly, it may mean that Korea is the first country that had eradicate malnutrition in Afghanistan. Moreover, if Korea supports 4~5 additional years, Afghanistan will produce 50,000 MT annually. Hope the Government of Korea supports the project once more. The

notion of Korea has been elevated due to soybean, hence if this continues with development of mineral resources this will surely create a synergy effect.”

Dr. Kwon had also established youth club “Seed of Hope”. The purpose of this club is to provide vocational technology to the youth who lack education and opportunities. Also, encourage the youth to participate community service. His plan is to expand youth club to 4,000 members in 10 provinces.

He also forecasted that if Soybean initiative works successfully in Afghanistan, it will surely be easier to enter Central Asian countries such as Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and etc.

Dr. Kwon has graduated Korea University in 1972 and got his Master’s degree and PhD at UC Davis and Ohio State University respectively.