



SNAPSHOT

Kosovo Grown Asparagus Debuts to Popular Acclaim

Cooperatively marketed asparagus flies off shelves, replacing pricier imports



2014 saw Kosovo's first commercial harvest of asparagus, capping a three-year effort by USAID to introduce cultivation of the spring delicacy. The attractively bundled spears enjoyed solid sales.



To stimulate interest in the asparagus crop among retailers, restaurateurs and consumers, USAID staged a culinary event featuring dishes made with the fresh-picked spears. Previously, the only asparagus sold in Kosovo was imported.

Kosovo growers sell their hand-picked asparagus under the brand name *Viridis*. It's Latin for fresh, young and green.

A new opportunity for Kosovo's farmers has sent up its first tender green shoots, only to see them quickly harvested, cooled, packaged and sold to an enthusiastic public.

Kosovo produced its first-ever asparagus crop in 2014, marking the culmination of a three-year effort by USAID to introduce cultivation of the spring delicacy.

During this debut eight-week season, 11 local growers sold more than two tons of asparagus spears. The growers cooperatively marketed the asparagus under the brand name *Viridis*, which is Latin for young, green and fresh.

The Kosovo-grown asparagus quickly supplanted imports in the local market, given its edge in quality, freshness and price. Sales were brisk: "It just flew off the shelves," said Mark Wood, program director of USAID's New Opportunities for Agriculture project.

An April promotional event staged by USAID at a local hotel downtown Pristina drew retailers, restaurateurs, hoteliers and asparagus enthusiasts, including the hosts of Kosovo television's top-rated cooking programs.

"This asparagus is a high-quality product," pronounced Vito de Angelis, the hotel's executive chef. "Of course, it will be on my menu." De Angelis treated the crowd to a full menu of creative asparagus dishes.

USAID introduced asparagus to Kosovo in 2011, establishing three nurseries to produce asparagus crowns. In 2012, farmers began transplanting those crowns to establish Kosovo's current 10.6 hectares (26.2 acres) of asparagus fields. Farmer-to-Farmer volunteers provided all the technical expertise for the project.

USAID also helped establish a modern processing line to ensure asparagus reached consumers fresh from the farm, beginning with 2014's initial commercial crop. The use of special packaging ensures a long shelf life for the hand-selected spears.

Kosovo's embrace of asparagus is helping prepare the way for European export sales as well. The country, located in southeastern Europe, can begin harvesting asparagus two weeks earlier than producers clustered in northern Europe due to the southern latitude of Kosovo and the ideal microclimate.

USAID, since 2011 through its four-year New Opportunities for Agriculture project, works to diversify Kosovo's agricultural output to promote growth, create jobs and generate exports.