



## SNAPSHOT

### Vineyard Conversion Replaces Unprofitable Grape Varieties Regrafting Matches Supply to Demand



Photo: USAID New Opportunities for Agriculture

*A grape expert binds a newly grafted grape scion to preexisting rootstock.*

“The problem is we can’t sell what we’re growing now. The cellars just aren’t buying,” said Derguti, a professional grafter and owner of a one-hectare vineyard. Zijajdin Derguti attended to learn a skill he could use to help himself ---and others.

A glut of wine has provoked a crisis in the heart of Kosovo’s grape-growing region. Each fall, vineyard owners leave to rot thousands of tons of unsold cabernet, merlot and other wine grapes. Meanwhile, this impoverished country in southeastern Europe imports 30 percent of the table grapes it consumes. The mismatch between supply and demand shortchanges Kosovo’s farmers and adds to an already lopsided balance of trade. It also sparks occasional violence, during protests organized by frustrated grape growers seeking government aid.

USAID recognized the overall situation presented an opportunity to intervene in way that would lead to positive outcomes for growers, consumers and Kosovo as a whole. In mid-March 2013, USAID, through its New Opportunities for Agriculture project, embarked on the rapid-fire conversion of a portion of Kosovo’s wine grape vineyards, helping to regraft the vines to produce more lucrative table grapes.

The regrafting process preserves each vine’s rootstock, but changes the fruiting variety that grows from that stock. In this way, a modest-sized wine grape vineyard can be converted to producing table grapes in short order. Regrafting is also less expensive than the wholesale uprooting and replanting of a vineyard.

Sponsored by USAID, two Italian experts recently demonstrated the technique to 25 grape growers in a vineyard above this town, the center of Kosovo’s grape industry.

Regrafting, also called top-working, first involves pruning back the vine. Next, a short shoot, or scion, of a new variety is inserted into the rootstock. Within a month, the tissues of the rootstock and scion merge. Harvests can resume the following season.

USAID is supporting the conversion of 10 vineyards in the Rahovec area by importing 88,000 scions of a dozen varieties of table grapes, including red globe and Thompson seedless. The quantity suffices to regraft five hectares of vineyards now given over to the locally unprofitable production of wine grapes.

USAID, through New Opportunities for Agriculture (NOA) a four-year program that started in January 2011 and ends in January 2015 focuses on creation of market linkages, increasing and diversifying agricultural products, improving food quality and safety, increasing affordable and accessible credit, in addition the activity supports the sector through small grants to farmers, agricultural enterprises and association.