



CASE STUDY

Saffron Spices Up Kosovo Agriculture

Thanks to USAID Kosovo has resumed production of one of the most celebrated commodities from its rich agricultural past - saffron. An intense red color, sweet aroma and pungent flavor combine to make saffron a spice like no other.



Photo: Xheraldina Cernobregu

Saffron is a high-value crop that is ideally suited for Kosovo's climate, soil, altitude and small-hold farmers. USAID is helping them to grow, brand and market saffron to increase agricultural production and rural income.

Agriculture is Kosovo's biggest industry, but the economic growth of the sector is constrained by a lack of equipment, a limited variety of crops, outdated methods of production and small-hold farms. To overcome those challenges, the USAID New Opportunities for Agriculture Program introduces new crop varieties and supports farmers in production, branding and marketing.

Because of assistance from USAID as well as from other international donors, Kosovo has resumed production of one of the most celebrated commodities from its rich agricultural past - saffron. An intense red color, sweet aroma and pungent flavor combine to make saffron a spice like no other. Saffron's cost is unmatched by any other spice; a single gram retails for 10 Euros or more.

USAID's New Opportunities for Agriculture Program, which started in January 2011, supported seven growers in purchasing bulbs from the Netherlands, as well as with packaging and branding late 2012. USAID also sponsored a promotional event at Pristina's Swiss Diamond Hotel on Dec. 19, 2012 to introduce Kosovo's saffron producers to local restaurateurs, grocers and consumers.

Local growers such as Arber Berisha are looking beyond the local market, toward lucrative foreign markets. In the last two years, Berisha has planted 150,000 saffron crocus flowers across a half-hectare plot outside of Rahovec/Orahovac. He expects to produce about 400 grams of saffron this year. Though he is working with a French partner, Berisha acknowledges he must expand output in order to secure foreign buyers. It's just one of the challenges faced by growers of such a lucrative but labor-intensive product.

"It's very difficult work," Berisha says. "It's all done by hand."

Testing confirms Kosovo saffron exceeds international first-class standards for taste, color and aroma. Saffron also is ideally suited to the country's soil, climate, altitude and small-hold farms, making it a crop with great potential for increasing agricultural output and rural income.

USAID New Opportunities for Agriculture (NOA), a four-year program is assisting Kosovo's agriculture sector to create market linkages, increase and diversify agricultural products, improve food quality, increase affordable and accessible credit, in addition the activity supports the sector through small grants to farmers, agricultural enterprises and association.