



SUCCESS STORY

Women Farmers in Kosovo Realize Their Potential

Solar drying turns flowers into cash crops



Sylhane proudly shows the new solar drying tunnel she uses for collected aromatic plants

“The mindset has really changed in our villages. Women are more confident – they are now working, growing, collecting, drying and selling their goods for profit.” ~ Sylhane Ramadani, lead woman farmer, Gotovushë, Kosovo.

January, 2017—In Sylhane Ramadani’s village of Gotovushë/Gotovuša, flowers are as much about giving as they are about getting.

Villagers in this multiethnic and mountainous corner of southern Kosovo still gift garden-grown blossoms to friends and neighbors. Increasingly, however, women farmers are growing, processing and selling the flowers to aggregators for export to Europe. As a result of the sales, women farmers in this heavily rural region receive much welcomed additional income.

“We have come to realize that we should be selling what we grow, and we can be making real profit from our work,” says Ramadani, 45. “Why give away for free what I work to grow, when I can secure an income for my family?”

For years, women in the region have collected wild-harvested and home-grown medicinal herbs, including mallow. The flower is a common ingredient in many shampoos, face creams and skin lotions. When sold fresh, the flowers had poor margins, selling for roughly 1 Euro per kilogram.

To improve the situation, USAID through its Agricultural Growth and Rural Opportunities (AGRO) program, supplied 50 women farmers with simple solar drying tunnels in July 2016. The tunnels resemble a greenhouse with black plastic film walls. The tunnel’s black plastic absorbs the sun’s rays, which heats the interior, accelerating the drying process. Multiple shelves furnish each tunnel with 645 square feet (60 square meters) of drying space.

It takes just three to four days to dry the flowers. “All the buyer needs to do is to immediately package them and prepare them for export,” explains Ramadani. The value added by drying translates into much healthier margins. The women can sell dried flowers for over 5 Euros per kilogram, says Samir Riza, a medicinal and aromatic plant expert with USAID’s agricultural activities.

“The mindset has really changed in our villages,” says Ramadani, who leads a local multiethnic women’s cooperative. “Women are more confident—they are now working, growing, collecting, drying and selling their goods for profit.”

USAID’s intervention has provided more than 32,000 square feet (3,000 square meters) of drying capacity to the region. In addition to mallow seeds, the women farmers received marigold, cornflower and ornamental sunflower seeds. The crops all can be farmed intensively, an advantage for local women who tend small and fragmented plots. The women were also training on crop management, including on how to pick delicate blossoms without harming them.

A local firm, Agroprodukt Sh.P.K., buys nearly everything the women grow

and dry, exporting the crops on to Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The dried flowers and other herbs earn women farmers each season about 300 Euros—an amount approaching the nation’s average monthly wage. The process is part of USAID’s efforts to develop Kosovo’s medicinal and aromatic plant industry, and increase incomes among Kosovo’s majority rural population.

“This is additional income for our families, and that is welcomed by the whole household,” Ramadani says. “In the near future, we expect an increase in cultivation, wherever we have land available, an increase in wild collection, and ultimately an increase in sales and profits.”

USAID AGRO program, which runs from 2015 to 2020, is designed to enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of targeted Kosovar agribusinesses in domestic and export markets by increasing productivity and marketability.