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SUCCESS STORY

Dairy Workers Boost Product Safety

Business development and new equipment help dairies and processors comply with international standards



Photo: Karen Byrne, Chemonics International

Julja Idrizi emphasizes quality in milk production at H&H Farms.

“We’re not waiting until we’re required [to implement food safety protocols],” said dairy processor Irfan Fusha. “Our children consume these products. We want them to be safe.”

As Julja Idrizi locks her arms around the calf’s middle, a student grabs it by the horns, buying enough time for another student to stick a needleful of vaccine into its hindquarters. “It takes six months of practice before they can do everything right,” says Julja of the farmers and students she trains to take care of dairy cows. But her business, H&H Farms in Shtime/Stimlje (the town’s Albanian/Serbian names), Kosovo, depends on farmers doing things right; her milk processor, Devolli, will only buy quality-tested milk.

Processors like Devolli are driving the pace of change in Kosovo’s dairy sector. If processors can bring down costs, raise quality and diversify products, they can displace imports — which currently make up 90 percent of the domestic market — and compete in regional markets. But first, producers like Julja must comply with international standards.

With USAID assistance, Julja traveled to Albania and Macedonia for the needed equipment and cleaning supplies to improve production and ensure milk safety. USAID also helped her develop a business plan for H&H Farms, obtain an initial loan and improve feed for the herd.

USAID has also helped ABI, a dairy processor in Prizren, develop and market new products, such as flavored yogurt and whey. Now, ABI has undertaken an ambitious program to implement two international food safety protocols — GMP and HACCP. “We’re not waiting until we’re required,” says ABI owner Irfan Fusha. “Our children consume these products. We want them to be safe.” Once ABI has put the prescribed practices in place, the plant can be audited and certified as compliant by a licensed quality inspector — and begin exporting to the European Union.

Irfan would like to expand production, but it’s complicated. “Everything is linked,” he says. “If you buy more equipment, you have to hire more employees, arrange for more incubation and storage space, increase marketing and distribution.” He churns his hands, conjuring the future. “Everything needs to happen at the same time.”