



SNAPSHOT

Women Farmers Prosper by Growing Skin Care Ingredient

Plant used in cosmetics brings income to rural poor.



Common mallow flowers are hand-picked by women farmers in southern Kosovo before being taken to a collection center.



Ankica Živković instructs her fellow farmers on how to harvest the flowers and leaves of the common mallow.

A flower prized by the women's skin-care industry is also the key to long-lasting financial stability for a multi-ethnic group of women who have recently started growing it in Kosovo. Common mallow is used as an emollient in hundreds of beauty products. Now, with support from USAID and the nonprofit Women for Women International, 17 ethnic Serb and Albanian women in the agricultural southern region of Shtërpçë/Štrpce are also reaping its benefits.

"I like this crop because I get to work close to my home and it requires very little investment," says Ankica Živković, a farmer in the village of Gotovusha. "With other crops you don't always have the market for it, so it's hard. In the case of common mallow we are guaranteed a market."

USAID provided the women with the raw materials, drip-irrigation equipment, and technical advice needed to raise the crop in April 2014, which is very delicate and subject to stringent export standards by the European Union.

The women began harvesting the plant's leaves and flowers in May, increasing the supply for local agricultural aggregator Agroprodukt, which buys the crop from a network of small family farmers on a daily basis from May through October. Agroprodukt buys the harvested mallow for 1.5 Euros per kilogram; a price that allows each farmer, working in her spare time, to earn upward of the 300 euros per month an average worker makes in Kosovo.

The women tend family plots that range in size from 500 to 1,000 square meters. Overall, about 4 hectares (10 acres) of mallow are under cultivation across Kosovo. The nature of the mallow plant limits its cultivation to small plots.

Agroprodukt collects and dries the mallow plant's leaves and flowers and then exports them, mostly to buyers in Germany. There, the plant finds its way into a large number of cosmetic and natural-health products.

Some of the women farmers have begun to dry mallow on their own, which earns them a higher price and expands Agroprodukt's export capacity. In response, the firm is considering offering some of the growers a five-year contract.

Since 2011, USAID's four-year New Opportunities for Agriculture project has been working to diversify Kosovo's agricultural output to promote growth, create jobs and generate exports.