



SUCCESS STORY

Kosovo Farmers Turn Chili Pepper Into Commercial Venture

The start of a great journey' to compete with imports



Lujeta Kuraj, USAID Agriculture Growth and Rural Opportunities [Tetra Tech]

Zijadin Kelmendi, a first time chili pepper grower, sold 1,000 kilograms of the crop to local collection center after second day of harvest.

“The quality of the chili pepper yield that is being harvested and its robustness has exceeded our expectations.”

~ Fehim Rexhepi, owner of Agrocelina collection center.

September 2018 – Although farming has been a long journey for Zijadin Kelmendi, it is more than a passion to him.

“I have cultivated vegetables with my father since I was 10 years old — farming is my life,” he said enthusiastically. Kelmendi, who lives in Kosovo’s municipality of Rahovec, is now hoping to turn a new crop, which is earning more attention in the country, into a profitable business.

Chili pepper, or feferoni, farming is relatively new to Kosovo farmers, although USAID had previously introduced production of chili peppers to small farmers in various regions of Kosovo. This year for the first time, with the help of USAID’s [Agricultural Growth and Rural Opportunities](#) program, Kelmendi has piloted chili pepper on a 0.3 hectare area of his plot located in the village of Bellackr. He is one of 10 farmers to begin growing the new crop under the program.

Under the USAID program, one of Kosovo’s largest fruit and vegetable processors, Abi & Elif 19, has contracted collection center Agrocelina to help farmers produce local chili peppers with seeds that they purchase. While, in the past, the trivial production of chili peppers was led by small-scale pepper farmers, this year Abi & Elif 19 and Agrocelina are collaborating on commercial production of the crop.

It is the third day of harvest for Kelmendi and, by the looks of it, the farmer expects to harvest and sell 7-9 tons of chili peppers by the end of the season. This is why he hired 10 seasonal harvesters, mainly women from the Gjakova region, to collect ripened chili peppers and prepare them for transport to the Agrocelina collection center in Xerxe village. Kelmendi has a contract with the collection center, which buys the entire bulk of chili peppers from the farmer and sells them to Abi & Elif 19 in Prizren for processing.

Fehim Rexhepi, the owner of the collection center, is very pleased with the first batch received: “The quality of the chili pepper yield that is being harvested and its robustness has exceeded our expectations.”

The center has already sent over the first batch of 1,000 kilograms to Abi & Elif 19 for processing, and they too have confirmed their satisfaction with the quality of the chili peppers. According to Rexhepi, Kosovo processing companies annually import about 1,000 tons of chili peppers from the neighboring countries, while scattered production from around Kosovo brings about only 50 tons of chili pepper to these processors.

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“I believe that this is the start of a great journey of Kosovo farmers toward substituting imported chili peppers for processing,” said Rexhepi.

After planting his first chili peppers in May, Kelmendi already has plans to expand production next year following this year’s successful harvest and profit. “I have no problem with hiring and paying good wages to seasonal workers, which is why I am looking forward to next year’s challenges and success in the chili pepper sector,” he said.

USAID’s Agricultural Growth and Rural Opportunities, a five-year activity that started in 2015, focuses on increasing agricultural productivity, marketability and responsiveness to markets. The program is designed to enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of targeted Kosovo agribusinesses in domestic and export markets. To date, the program has established over 3,400 hectares of farmland with improved technologies and has facilitated over \$70 million in sales.