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THE LEAD FARMER & THE COOPERATIVE A BIG SUCCESS

Yervandashat Fruit Production and Drying Cooperative exported the first two batches of dried fruits to Russia in 2013, in total 1,400 kg for test marketing in “Alphabet of Taste” high-end supermarket chain. At this point the dried fruits are sold in more than 30 stores of the chain. The initiative is sustained by the ongoing support of the USDA/CARD.

CARD started a project in Yervandashat village of the Armavir region by identifying the lead farmer who could provide technical assistance and guidance to the entire community. The lead farmer was Arkadya Khachikyan. After testing some technological and marketing approaches with Mr. Khachikyan for the local market, CARD initiated the establishment of the farmer cooperative in Yervandashat.

CARD supported the farmers to make gradual improvements through assisting in the introduction of new fruit drying technologies and packaging equipment, upgrading of production facilities, and enhancing of food safety and production quality. These small systemic changes over time have led to the establishment of systems not only in one community but also in the entire region.

Through gradual and persistent assistance, the farmers gathered around Arkadya Khachikyan, who has undertaken the quality control, packaging, and marketing function of the group of farmers. Thanks to assistance from CARD and collaboration within the group, the farmers were able to increase not only their annual production volumes, but also substantially improve the production quality and consequently achieved the quality which satisfied the needs of the Russian high-end supermarket chain, “Alphabet of Taste”. Through small targeted assistance, CARD project reached a transitional change in the sector. Due to a better quality, safety, and volumes, dried fruits are produced not only for local consumption, but also to satisfy the growing demand for consistent export.

Overall, CARD supported the farmers with introduction of new drying technologies such as the electric shelf dryers which make it possible to increase the production quantities, extend production season, and improve the quality which is indispensable for the further export and promote the development of the dried fruit sector.

In 2013, six members of the cooperative received technical and financial support from CARD to improve their production facilities, sanitary conditions, and construct new sun dryers for production of high quality dried fruits. As part of export support, the cooperative received vacuum packaging equipment; it is necessary to pack products in vacuum pouches to extend product shelf life.

The assistance increased the capacity of farmers to produce high quality dried fruits by about eight tons annually, and about 45 tons of fresh fruit was processed in Yervandashat.

The cooperative has become an important source of income and a driving force for the development of the fruit drying initiative in the community and neighboring villages. A total of 30 tons of dried fruit was produced by 25 members of the cooperative this year.

Another successful project, within the framework of Dried Fruit Sector development project initiated by CARD, is the export of chocolates produced by Arcolad LLC, which started this year. The company began exporting its chocolate candies with locally produced dried fruit to the same supermarket chain in Russia “Alphabet of Taste”.

Currently their products are available in more than 30 stores of the chain. Arcolad LLC is the next step of value added of delicious fruits of Armenia after drying them in Yervandashat and other communities where CARD established modern fruit drying capacities.



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