

## Tashir Master Cheese Makers' School Spring and Summer Semesters 2006

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In 2001, USDA MAP assisted Dustr Melanya cheese plant in establishment of a Master Cheese Makers' Training School in Tashir, the main cheese-making region of Armenia. The school is intended to train cheese-making specialists, raise the level of their skills, as well as organize practical training of students from the Armenian Agricultural Academy or any other educational institution.

The curriculum for students and private individuals is designed by Dustr Melanya and the ASAU Dairy Science Department. It covers various topics of dairy science, such as milking and udder hygiene, milk storing and transportation, laboratory analysis, cheese production technology, sanitation issues, packaging, labeling and marketing of cheeses.

During 2002 - 2004, five specialist groups (40 representatives of Armenian private companies and four cheese makers from Georgia) and two Armenian State Agrarian University student groups (22 students) received an intensive master cheese maker's education. Participants' feedback and comments indicate that the School has provided valuable support to increasing knowledge and experience of cheese makers throughout Armenia.

In 2006, CARD continued providing technical and financial assistance to Dustr Melanya for organization of training courses at the Training School.

The sixth group of trainees started its 3-week spring semester at Master Cheese Makers' Training School on May 1, 2006. The group included eight cheese makers from Tashir, Abovyan, Gavar, and Artashat regions. The following dairies sent their specialists to the training: VIP Messenger (2 trainees), Khak (1 trainee), Chanakh (1 trainee), Dustr Melanya (2 trainees) and a newly established small-scale milk processor in Tashir (2 trainees).

The summer semester was offered to 12 students of ASAU Dairy Science Department. The training semester was again three weeks from June 1 through June 23, 2006.

The curriculum for both semesters included 74 hours of theoretical training and 40 hours of practical cheese making. During the training students covered the topics such as milk production at dairy farms, history of establishment of farmers Associations and milk collection centers, Quality Control of milk and dairy products, sanitary requirements at dairy plants, production of yellow hard and fresh salty cheeses, milk processing equipment, and marketing of dairy products.

During practical hours students learned production of Lori, Chanakh, Chechil, Suluguni, Alashkert, Tzuk, Tigrani traditional Armenian salty cheeses, as well as European type yellow hard cheeses, such as Swiss and Dutch cheeses.

One of the training days was conducted by Zara Davtian, Senior Food Quality Assurance specialist of CARD. She delivered lectures on dairy microbiology, food born diseases, food safety management systems (HACCP), application of cleaning and sanitizing supplies, sanitary requirements at dairy plants, personal hygiene rules, and Good Manufacturing practices with demonstration of tutorial videotapes.

In addition to the course package prepared by the School faculty, students received The Sanitary Requirements for Food Processing Plants and Employees Guide to Food Safety manuals, translated and published by CARD.

Since its establishment, USDA MAP and CARD provided financial and technical support to the Master Cheese Makers Training School, including the cost sharing of the operational expenses and furnishing for 2 lecture rooms, a kitchen, and 4 bedrooms. Since 2003, private enterprises started contributing to their own education. Thus, initially only 10% of the total expenses was covered by them, and in 2006 their cost-share reached 45%.

The final examination and the graduation ceremony of spring 2006 semester took place on May 20 and of summer semester - on June 23, 2006. School faculty and CARD representatives congratulated the graduates and handed the Master Cheese Makers' Certificates. Finally, Dr. Lakshman, Louisiana State University, Dr. Gennadii Myroniuk and Ms. Anna Vasylenko, International Institute for Food Safety and Quality, Ukraine, visiting Armenia under the Technical Assistance Program to Support the Armenian Food Safety System, initiated by USDA, attended the graduation ceremony of summer semester.