

## The US Ambassador's Visit to USDA/CARD Project Sites in the Syunik Region

On April 25, 2012, the US Ambassador, John Heffern, with CARD representatives visited two USDA/CARD project sites in the Syunik region.

The first stop was made at the "Barisovka" dairy processing plant in Tsg huk village. The Ambassador was impressed with the combination of assistance, including the initial credit received from CARD AgroCredit Universal Credit Organization (UCO), and the training and capacity building support from CARD for producing new, high value European cheeses. To the question how he decided to start the cheese business Mjasnik answered that USDA sent him to USA for the training, and there he tasted goat cheese for the first time in dairy processing, and decided to start the goat cheese business in his village.

The owner of the cheese plant, Mjasnik Grigoryan, said, "I could not have achieved all this without the support of CARD." He explained to the visitors how he started with a small one-room operation with only one type of cheese produced. In 2006 he built a new cheese plant through CARD's credit facility, - CARD AgroCredit. Now nine different types of cheese are produced in his plant and it has all been accomplished with technical and financial assistance from CARD.



The Ambassador asked Mjasnik for an example of how CARD has supported him. The plant owner showed the new Mascarpone cheese which was produced two weeks ago for the first time and the new cheese making equipment he got from CARD. And to the question what his future plans are, he answered, "I want to extend my production to be able to export Mozzarella cheese to Russia. To reach my goal, I want to enlarge the production facility and I asked CARD for the design of a HACCP standard facility and help to meet the food safety standards." In addition, CARD is negotiating with the Italian and Bulgarian equipment production companies to import new equipment to produce Mozzarella cheese.



Mjasnik also emphasized the significance of CARD's assistance to small farmers to produce good quality milk for high quality cheese production. It was mentioned that 3 years ago there was an outbreak of brucellosis in the village and about 70% of the cattle died highly affecting the farming communities. Farmers were without money and the cheese plant had no milk. CARD director Gagik Sardaryan said that this was the main reason to start the USDA-supported Animal Health (AH) project in this region.

In his address, the Ambassador said, "I am sure CARD will continue to support you in the future to meet your goals and realize the cheese export to Russia". He also promised to pay a visit to the Borisovka cheese plant again in two years.

The next stop was at the Farm and Veterinary Service Center (FVSC) in Sarnakunk village. The Manager of the center, Suren Vardanyan, organized a tour in the facilities and explained how he works with more than 300 farmers and 8 veterinarians by going to the nearby villages to provide veterinary and artificial insemination services. Suren mentioned that he got many new ideas on how to run a private veterinary service from the training organized by USDA in the scope of the Cochran Fellowship Program.

The US Ambassador had a talk with farmers and veterinarians who cooperate with the center. Around the coffee table, in a friendly atmosphere, the ambassador asked questions regarding the benefits received from the USDA/CARD projects in the Syunik region, the Governorship assistance, etc.



Among the veterinarians present were Gevorg Harutyunyan from the Brnakot community, and Tigran Margaryan from Hacavan village. When the AH project was first launched, Gevorg refused to take part in the trainings organized within the framework of AH project. He said, "I don't have time for trainings, I better mow down the grass". But when there was a need to do the hoof trimming and the dehorning of the cattle, he turned to CARD for assistance and understood the great importance of the Animal Health project and the trainings. Today, he is not only involved in the trainings, but also he is one of the active private veterinary and AI service providers in the village. He has already done 380 artificial inseminations in 2012.

Tigran had no interest in providing veterinary services either, as he didn't see any perspectives doing this work, but thanks to AH project and trainings, today he is one of the demanded veterinarians in the region providing service to hundreds of farmers.

Animal Health Project Coordinator, Tigran Gabrielyan, and the project assistant, Nazeli Grigoryan, participated in the discussions and answered many questions. A Power Point presentation about the AH Project and the FVSC was held as well by the AH team.

Then, Mr. Heffern expressed an interest to visit a nearby cattle farm. The farmer named Norik showed the Ambassador the healthy cows of different breeds resulting from artificial insemination.



CARD employees informed the Ambassador about the registration of the veterinary medicines in RoA which takes 6 months and is rather expensive, nearly 3,000 US Dollar, whereas in Georgia, the same process takes several days, and costs only 100 US Dollar. CARD informed the RoA Government Authorities about this issue, but has got no feedback till now. Mr. Heffern promised to assist CARD in this and asked to provide information through USDA office in Yerevan.

In the end, Mr. Ambassador also promised to provide CARD with information on the simple and cheap technology for methane gas production later on to apply in small cattle farms.