In Montenegro: Helping Farmers Grow

Dragana Varezic in the Montenegro Country Office and Milos Sturanovic, MIDAS Project Manager, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development offer this story.

Like Vucko Pesic’s family, 70 percent of Montenegro's rural people live off the land. Most own small farms, and though the country has plenty of water and land, and a good growing climate, money to invest, improve, and raise agricultural production is scarce.

Vucko Pesic was born in the town of Bijelo Polje in the rural and agricultural north of Montenegro. In 2002, he and his wife decided to move to the family property in the village of Tomasevo, not far from Bijelo Polje. The property had been virtually abandoned.

From town to farm

“I decided to move to the village as I saw that as the only way to support my family; living in town and working as a low paid laborer did not bring sufficient money to support my wife, and my three children. So, I decided to turn to agriculture and take advantage of the family property,” says Pesic.

He began his life as a farmer with three cows, about ten sheep and 100 beehives, which he inherited from his father.

A secret recipe

For several years, the family ate everything it grew, made and raised. And they struggled with farm life, until Pesic's mother taught her daughter-in-law how to make cheese, using a special family recipe passed down for generations.

A breakthrough year

Then, in 2007, Pesic managed to market the cheese to a local restaurant. The restaurant, Durmitor, is famous for its good homemade food. After that breakthrough, the cheese began to sell itself. More and more people heard of it, bought it and ate it. The phone began ringing and orders poured in. Demand outstripped supply. The family wanted to buy more livestock and more equipment for cheese making, but they had a hard time raising the money.

A small grant, at just the right time

Pesic turned to a program in Montenegro that offers small grants to small farmers supported by the World Bank. Farmers have to contribute 50 percent of the investment, and they must present a business plan that outlines sustainable
growth and increased production. Competition is fierce.

Pesic is delighted that he qualified for the grant, "I now have 16 cows and 5 calves, and this will help me create a good starting point for my children when they grow up and find their own way." He says he is still paying back some loans but, "with expanding the capacities, which will bring more income, I am sure to improve overall conditions on the farm and my household, I am building a future for my children."

**Earning extra Euros**

The grant program offered them almost 9,500 euros and the Pesics kicked in the rest, for a total of almost 19,000 euros in basic improvement and upgrades. With the money, the Pesics invested in crucial equipment and 5 more cows for milk for their cheese.

**Everyone helps**

All family members help with the farm chores. Vucko is responsible for the livestock, while his wife Milijanka runs cheese production. The couple's six children help clean the stables and feed and milk the cows.

The new equipment, new cows and expanded work are boosting Pesics' income by over 1,500 euros a month. They are increasing their cheese production by ten kilos a day.

**Modernizing an age-old occupation**

The Pesic family is not alone. Montenegro is working to improve food safety standards, upgrade facilities, and modernize agriculture. Officials hope this focus on farming will raise living standards and export earnings while also speeding integration with the European Union. The small grants program aims to modernize food safety and production while also managing farming within the country's broader environmental landscape.

As for the Pesics, they are happy to be a small part of big changes to agriculture in Montenegro. They've gone from poor laborers in town to successful farmers running their own company. Driven by demand, a delicious product, and a grant that let them expand when they needed it most, they represent a new kind of business-oriented farmer in Montenegro's rural north.