



Serbia and FAO

Partnering for capacity development and sound policies

The partnership between Serbia and FAO began in 2001 and has continued to grow, with Serbia providing sustained support to the achievement of FAO's Strategic Objectives. Technical assistance has focused on support to the development of appropriate policies and good governance, investment support, sustainable development and social inclusion – particularly for small farmers – and the strengthening of cooperation and stability in the region. Following the recent floods, cooperation with Serbia has also featured disaster recovery and risk management.

Serbian agriculture – getting back on track

In May 2014, Serbia was struck by unprecedented rainfall and flooding. Before the flood waters fully subsided, an FAO emergency response team was on the ground to evaluate the damage and plan an emergency recovery operation. FAO concentrated its support on Serbia's large number of small-scale family-run farms, distributing emergency assistance and animal feed to 7 431 families in 32 municipalities.

FAO further mobilized 9.5 million euros from the European Union (EU) to support additional vulnerable families across 41 municipalities. In cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection, and together with agricultural extension services, FAO designed 23 agricultural recovery aid packages. By January 2016 the programme had assisted a total of 26 387 families through the provision of crop seeds and fruit-tree saplings, fertilizer, animal feed and livestock, a variety of farming equipment, nearly 1 000 beehives, and the construction of greenhouses.

An additional 8 000 small agricultural producers are expected to receive assistance in 2016, raising the number of beneficiaries to a total of 34 500 small-scale farming households (about 144 000 people).

Reducing and managing disaster risk

Building on past experience, in 2015 FAO organized a workshop which introduced a new National Disaster Risk Management Programme to 25 managers and other professionals from Serbia's Ministry of Agricultural and Environmental Protection and the Office of Reconstruction

Contributing to Serbia's agricultural development priorities

Serbia was awarded European Union (EU) candidate status in March 2012, and in January 2014 the first Intergovernmental Conference marked the formal start of the accession negotiations. The country's current focus for agriculture is to obtain EU pre-accession funds for rural and institutional development in preparation for its eventual accession.

The Government and the UN Country Team are currently finalizing the country's new UN Development Partnership Framework (2016-2020), which will be used for programming development assistance up to 2020. FAO's assistance in Serbia will contribute to two of the priority areas identified in this strategic framework, namely:

- Economic development, growth and employment
- Environment, climate change and resilient communities

and Flood Relief. The occasion provided the opportunity for participants to work with FAO experts to define priority activities for disaster risk reduction and management activities applicable to country's agriculture sector.

Another initiative revolved around "Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards" presented through a series of training sessions targeting more than 60 government and professional staff. Participants were trained in the provision of emergency response and recovery in support of households and livestock farmers.

Serbia is also involved in a broader project for the western Balkans which is designed to strengthen the capacity of national agriculture sectors in the face of disasters and climate change. National line ministries are receiving guidance on how to improve technical capacities, tools and methods, with the overall objective of increasing farming communities' resilience to natural hazards.

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Supporting Serbia's competitiveness through quality enhancement

While Serbia's agriculture is gradually adjusting to the EU markets, most value chains will have to focus on quality. As part of the efforts in the development of origin-based labels in the horticultural sector, FAO and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) are working together to introduce geographical indication (GI) status for food products in Serbia. A GI is a distinctive sign used to certify that a product originates in the territory of a particular country, region or locality where its quality, reputation or other characteristics are linked to its geographical origin.

GI-awarded products often gain recognition for their high quality. Typical Serbian products that are GI candidates include fresh raspberries from Arilje, *ajvar* (pepper paste) from Kopaonik, and a unique cherry, the *oblačinska višnja*, named after the village of Oblačina in the south of the country.

"FAO's work can only be truly successful when field activities, policies and global public goods are connected."

José Graziano da Silva,
FAO Director-General

With funding from Luxembourg, the joint project builds on FAO's expertise in the development of GIs. Activities have included training to assist producer groups in the GI registration process.

Forest infrastructure planning and construction

FAO is supporting the assessment of current practices in road planning and construction of forest roads in Serbia. Ten training courses and a study tour have been delivered for forest practitioners, and computer equipment with specialized software has been deployed in the Ministry of Agriculture's Forest Management Department.

Implemented under the Organization's Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP), this project is contributing to the implementation of national policies for sustainable development; broader social participation in policy development and implementation; an increased supply of timber and other forest products and services; rural poverty reduction; and – thanks to increased forest sector incomes – growth in GDP.

Forest infrastructure planning and construction in Serbia

FAO supports the assessment of current practices in road planning and construction and of the conditions of forest roads in Serbia. Two training courses for forest practitioners on forest road planning and road maintenance, with a special focus on water management enhanced the capacity of forestry professionals.

The TCP contributes to the implementation of the national policies for sustainable development; increased supply of timber and other forest products and services; reducing rural poverty and increasing GDP by raising forest sector incomes; a technically stronger, modern forest service

oriented to supporting private and public forest development in a sustainable way; wider people's participation in policy development and implementation, and conservation of forests, watersheds and biodiversity related to forest ecosystems.

Facilitating access to agricultural financing

Serbian farmers face difficulties in financing pre- and post-harvest operations. In collaboration with EBRD, FAO has been assisting in the development of financial products that allow farmers to use their crops as collateral. Specifically, support has been provided for the drafting of a new law regulating the financing of agricultural production in Serbia.

Promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection and recently approved by the Serbian Parliament, the law will allow farmers to use their products as collateral even before harvest, and to obtain working capital as credit from local banks and input suppliers. This Serbian legislation is inspired by Brazil's *Cédula de Produto Rural* (Certificates of Agricultural Products, or "CPRs"), which is a simple and trusted financing tool, introduced by the Government of Brazil to close a gap in the agricultural financing system.

More recently, FAO and EBRD have supported the establishment of an electronic Register of Agricultural Financing, following up with training activities for farmers, bankers and traders, and generally raising awareness of the opportunities and benefits to be gained from the new crop-receipt system.

Facilitating policy processes

Serbia's integration into the EU involves the revision of a number of sectoral policies. To this end, EBRD and FAO have been supporting the establishment of structured policy dialogue mechanisms in the dairy and meat subsectors. Overall, the initiative aims to ensure that private stakeholders are involved in policy development; provide technical inputs to policy discussions; and support the elaboration of policy recommendations for both subsectors.

To date two public-private working groups in the meat and dairy sectors have been established together with the Serbian Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Management. Their primary purpose is to involve private sector stakeholders in policy formulation and support the elaboration of dairy and meat-related recommendations.

