



Media release

Switzerland and Ministry of Agriculture support development of organic agriculture in Albania

The Swiss Government and FiBL support Albania in boosting its development of organic agriculture which positively impacts the sustainable growth of rural economy. Organic farming generates important income for farmers, promotes and produces healthy food and contributes to environmental protection.

(Frick, March 3, 2015) In February the Albanian Minister of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration H.E. Edmond Panariti and the Swiss Ambassador to Albania H.E. Christoph Graf launched the project "Consolidation Fund Local Certification" in Tirana. It supports the local organic certification body of Albinspekt to offer professional inspection and certification services in order to facilitate access of small and medium enterprises to international markets.

Exports to Switzerland at 50 tons a year

Global markets for certified organic produce have been growing rapidly over the past two decades and are expected to grow even faster. "In case of wild collection of medicinal and aromatic plants, we have seen that companies involved in this business generate highly relevant income especially for women, helping them to gain additional income in poor rural areas" said Minister Panariti. "Organic production links Switzerland and Albania. The objective of this Swiss financed trade programme is to reduce poverty of small and medium-sized farmers by promoting trade with certified organic and fair-trade produce and to facilitate access to the European and Swiss markets.

"Albania is annually exporting 50 tons of organic herbs, medicinal and aromatic plants, and olive oil to Switzerland. said Ambassador Graf. Swiss consumers, as the ones in the other European countries, demand a wide variety of organic products with a supply all over the year. "That is an excellent opportunity for Albanian farmers to enter these growing markets with export of fruit and vegetables, berries, chestnuts and mushrooms, taking advantage of Albania's favourite climate and fertile soils" added Ms Beate Huber, the project leader from the Swiss Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL).

Strong increase of monthly incomes

Switzerland's contribution to the development of organic agriculture in Albania over the last decade has yielded visible and tangible results in three areas:

(1) Economy: Support to private sector facilitated the competitiveness of organic and environmentally-friendly products in the market. As a concrete example, it generated

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seasonal employment of 3700 poor farmers in the villages of Zus (Shkodra), Dushk (Lushnja), Vakuf (Peshkopi). Out of these, 3300 women saw their monthly income increase – tenfold.

(2) Institution: The Albanian organic inspection and certification body i.e. Albinspekt, accredited by the Albanian authorities and EU, has been established as well as the Institute of Organic Agriculture and Albanian Association of Marketing.

(3) Environment: organically certified surface for wild collection of medicinal and aromatic plants and chestnuts has doubled to over 250'000 hectares, almost 9% of Albania's total surface.

Today, Albania accounts 51 organic operators, 662 hectares under organic cultivation and 330'677 hectares certified organic wild collection. More than 90% of all the organic certified products are wild collection herbs and medicinal plants. The organic products of wild species, herbs, essential oils, mushrooms, chestnuts, olives and olive oil are exported to EU, North America, Switzerland, South east of Europe and Turkey. The volume of organic exports from Albania is around 1'000 ton processed products, added Sokol Stafa Director of Albinspekt-Albanian Certification Body.

Financing by Swiss Government

Certification is a pre-condition to enter international markets and gain premium prices. This organic trade programme, targeting Albania, Macedonia, Ukraine and India, is financed by the Government of Switzerland through the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) with an amount of around 1.6 million Swiss francs. With the new initiative, running until 2017, the Swiss government is strengthening the competitiveness of the Albanian certification body Albinspekt to help small and medium enterprises getting access to domestic certification services recognized by European markets. The project supports a policy framework conducive to the development of the organic sector and cooperates with the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration in aligning its organic legislation with the European Union regulations.

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