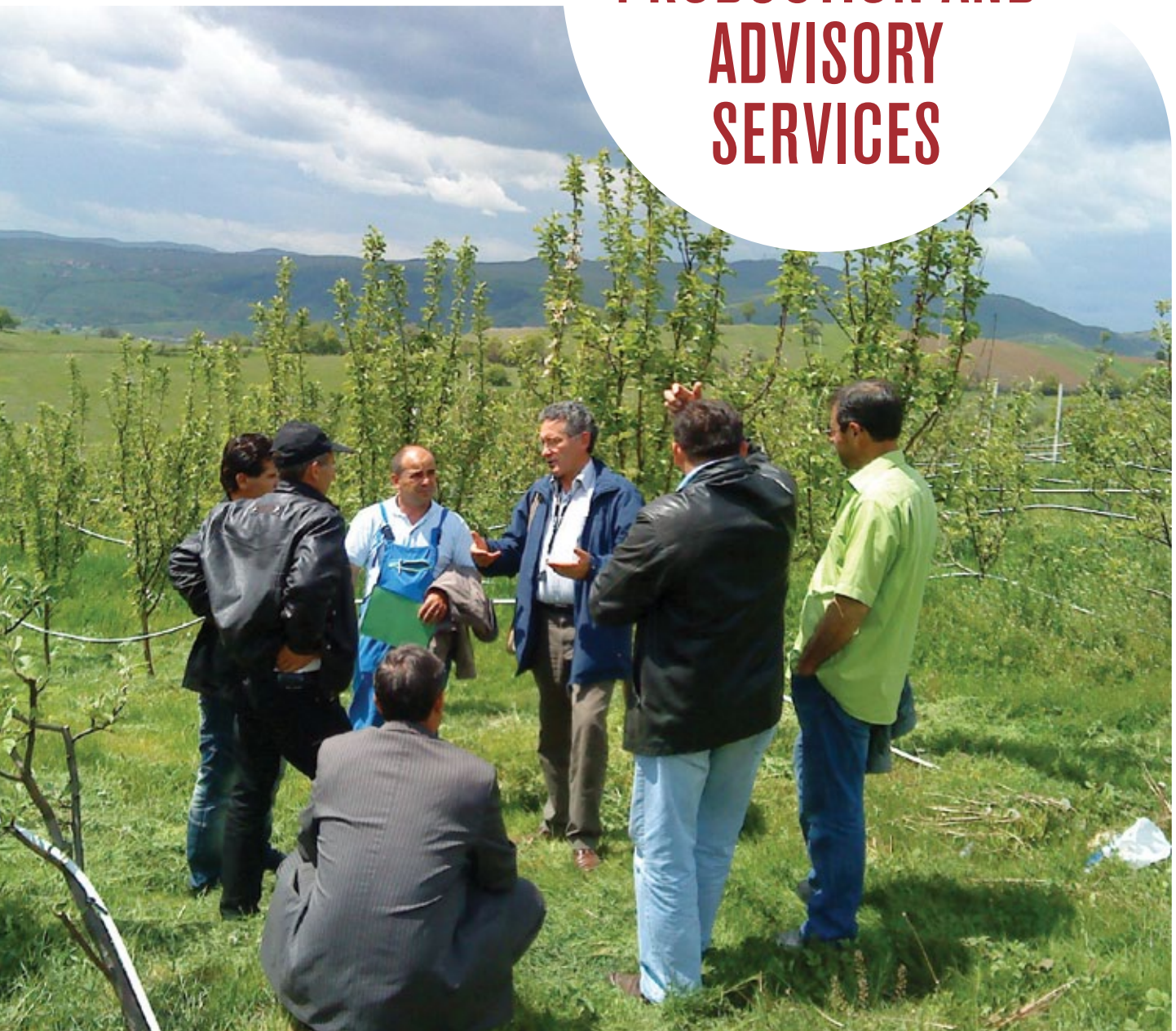


HPK INTERVENTION REPORT

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PROMOTION OF INTEGRATED PRODUCTION AND ADVISORY SERVICES



Summary

The project goal of Horticulture Promotion Kosovo (HPK) is to generate sustainable and broad based employment and income for the sector actors and contribute to economic growth. This report shows how HPK intervened in the advisory service system and new cultivation technologies following the principles of Integrated Production (IP).

Advisory service was very limited at the time when the Project started in 2001; and the quality, quantity and continuity (QQC) of production had been very weak. Having identified these constraints, HPK's interventions addressed them by stepping up a new model of private advisory services and modern production practices. New varieties and technolo-

gies have been introduced and promoted in line with Integrated Production in order to improve the quantity and quality of production as well as to be more environmentally friendly.

By today, large scale impact can be reported as 400 fruit and vegetable producers are implementing Integrated Production. Private commercial advisory services are established delivering their services to farmer groups against payment.

Importance of advice and extensions services has come back on the agenda of Kosovo Government. Efforts to strengthen the public service are under way; this can be seen as a positive effect of HPK interventions

Background

Kosovo was well known for supplying fruits and vegetables for both fresh and processing markets in former Yugoslavia. Market access and the capacity for large scale cultivation had been destroyed by the war in Kosovo, leading to low QQC of local production and many horticultural imports.

There were several constraints identified in the advisory services available to producers after the war. The public advisory system was weak and did not provide the appropriate knowledge and skills needed by horticulture producers. Furthermore, advisors were not trained and not aware of modern crop management techniques and practice such as IP; resulting in farmers using old production techniques with unspecified fertilization and often excessive use of pesticides for plant protection.



Vision & Strategy

The project's strategy was built around the hypothesis that the foundation of a sustainable fruit and vegetable sector is based on the introduction of new varieties and technologies (including IP), and that improved skills and would enable producers to better compete with imported products. The Horticulture Promotion in Kosovo (HPK) programme built up integrated production (IP) and advisory services as part of its goal to achieve improved Quality, Quantity and Continuity (QQC) of production in the horticulture sector. IP and advisory services were identified as intervention areas due to the sector constraints described in the background section above.

As the sector evolved during the years, HPK was focused on increasing the quantity through promotion of improved varieties, improving quality through introducing IP and improving continuity of production through coordinated planting strategies within formal and informal marketing groups. In addition, lot of efforts have been given to increase the knowledge's for advisory services on fruits and vegetables in Integrated Production.

WHAT IS INTEGRATED PRODUCTION (IP)

IP is a farming system that produces high quality food and other products by using natural resources and regulating mechanisms to replace polluting inputs, with the aim of achieving sustainable farming. Biological, cultural and chemical production methods are balanced carefully taking into account the protection of the environment, profitability and social requirements.

The diversification of extension services through promotion and support of private agricultural extension structures, parallel with the public extension service, will contribute to the quality of services available to producers. In this vision a functioning advisory services system will comprise improved services of private and public advisers; specialised in horticulture IP and creating appropriate conditions for sustainability without project intervention and funding in the long term.

Interventions by HPK

Since the start of the project, HPK has emphasized strongly on the importance of technical advice to farmers. Agricultural advice did not exist and modern production techniques were not introduced.

In the first two phases of HPK technical advice was mostly given by project staff directly to farmers. Gradually, the project moved into a model of service provision through trained service providers in the following phases, aiming at the establishment of private commercial services.



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Project driven approach: During 2001 to 2006, HPK used a project-driven approach with demonstrating new technologies such as integrated production and providing direct support to a small number of farmers through few informal advisory services and by the project staff. The outreach was small, individual farmers (not group organization) received advice and HPK provided and paid for such services. In order to change this approach, HPK engaged an experienced international company to assess the quality of production and support and backstop the preparation of technical guidelines for main crops.

Establishing private advisory services: From 2009 to 2012, HPK moved to a private advisory service model. An increasing number of commercial and semi-commercial farmers were seeking well-qualified agricultural expertise, which (similarly with the situation in most neighbouring countries), was not offered by the public agricultural extension service. As a result, Kosovo agriculture is moving (slowly) toward a more commercially oriented approach.

The main interventions in this new model included the following steps:

- **Formal training for advisers**
Project organized in 2009 and 2010 a modular training over 2 years to train private advisers in all

necessary technical aspects. Practical and theoretical training sessions have been delivered focusing on i) plant protection-Integrated Production (50% of total training), ii) crop & post harvest management for fruits and vegetable - (30%), iii) business planning & sector (development strategies (20%).

After 90 days of training, 34 advisers were certified for advisory services in Integrated Production of fruits and vegetable, enabling them to offer professional services to producers.

- **Study Trips**
Study trips were conducted to Albania with fruit and vegetable advisers, visiting most advanced parts of this country in order to gain an insight into how such a business can be developed.
- **Linking advice with farmers and make it affordable for them**
HPK supported linkages between advisory services and farmers. HPK co-financed number of days starting with 100% paid by the project in the early phase, reducing to 50% at the end of the phase, the rest paid either by the group farmers (association or informal group) or by the product aggregator. It was also a requirement that this advice be applied using the principles of Integrated Production.

Results

Formal and informal assessments of the outcomes of the production and advisory services conducted during the years showed advisory services including IP help individual farmers and big companies to increase productivity, quality and profitability of their farms and business.

Increased number of farmers implementing IP

This intervention has seen the number of farmers paying for advisory services based on IP principles

increase from no farmer in 2005 to 15 farmers in 2006 to more than 350 in 2011, in addition to this, in 2006 around 20 days for advices have been contracted in collaboration with farmers and fully paid by HPK, to 380 days contracted in co-finance basis with 50% in 2012.

Increased quality quantity and continuity of production

Yield increases in vegetable crops grew significantly, in the range of 10-30% for producers implementing IP

and using advisory services. Fastest yield increases are obtained through introduction of new seeds (e.g. hybrid), new inputs (especially fertilizer and irrigation system).

Quality of products is improved, leading to better marketing opportunities through implementation of Integrated Production. IP producers experienced more improvements in terms of profitability as well as productivity of fruits and vegetables than their fellow farmers who do not use advisory services.



The Impact Survey conducted by HPK in 2011 showed the positive results. For the two crops with the longest involvement in IP (apples and tomatoes), results indicate good progress. Apple farmers increased the area under IP cultivation from 50% to 75% between 2010 and

2011, and despite having considerably younger orchards than other farmers, achieved similar yields. Tomato producers adopting improved production technologies produced 20 tonnes per hectare more on average than farmers not adopting new technologies.

The improved continuity of production, namely supplying products for a longer period each season rather than the short peak in production typical of traditional production systems, is more difficult to assess. However, examples of farmers within informal marketing groups setting targets at the start of the season, and agreeing on who will plant which crops and when, have begun to occur.

Increased capacities and quality of advisers

34 advisers have been trained and equipped with appropriate skills on integrated production for fruits and vegetables. Amongst them, 17 continue to actively provide commercial services in 2012, working with formal and informal groups, providing practical advice on improving production practices to farmers.

In 2011 and 2012 producer groups/associations cover at least 50% of the cost for the services (in 2012 this reached 380 producers adopting IP advisory services). Advisers are paid 50 Euros/day for the service provision. As result of high qualification of advisory services, in 2012 advisors are being engaged for 120 extra days from other donors as well as from individual producers.

MR. BLERIM SHEFKIU, PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION SAYS:

“since the fruit producers from the Gjilan region established an association, they received many benefits. Producers from this region did not have the knowledge for pruning; an orchard with 1500 trees required us to hire workers to do it, costing 1200 Euros/year.

In order to gain such skills themselves, they hired and paid for a trained advisor who showed them how to prune. Now they are capable to do it themselves.



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In early 2012, HPK mandated two external consultants for an assessment and evaluation of the offered advisory services. Their findings are positive; advisers have appropriate skills to provide quality advices on implementation of IP. Further improvements are needed for better performance on prescription of crop situation, calculating balance nutrition and prioritizing agronomic interventions versus chemical treatments.

Higher income

Increased income is linked with better marketing opportunities for fresh fruits and vegetables. An advisory service is mentioned as key aspect for improving the

quality of products in order to sell them at higher prices. Advisory service is also important for meeting certification standards.

Data collected in the Impact Survey of 2011 showed that direct beneficiaries received a higher income compared with indirect beneficiaries: €16,295 compared with €10,217 on average.

An example of farmers improving their production through adopting advisory services is given in the Box. In this example, apple growers reduced the cost of inputs by being able to reduce the number of pesticide treatments and to learn how to prune their own orchards.

Lessons learnt

Over the last 7 years implementation of integrated production and advisory services has evolved rapidly. The number of producers accepting integrated production practices has rapidly expanded during these years. The results confirm the relevance of advisory services for agricultural knowledge dissemination among small and medium farmers for enhancing productivity, resilience and food security.

- Integrated Production has a sound base, now with more than 400 IP farmers involved. Thanks to good linkages between farmers and advisers production knowledge has increased. All partners now are capable to further develop the agricultural knowledge system and IP in Kosovo.
- Advisory services need to be seen as part of a wider agricultural knowledge system. Integrated Production brings together elements of agricultural research, extension, education and marketing and increasingly also information technology and communication systems.



- Advisers providing market oriented advice need to have a business mind set and different skills (e.g. deep understanding of functioning of value chains/ market systems). Advisory services that include market oriented approaches requires a change in content and in the competences of advisers, but will be more attractive to farmers if they contribute to better yield and higher farm income.

- Farmer's cost contribution to advisory service is an effective way to increase demand orientation, accountability and financial sustainability. Farmers are willing to pay for advice if the service is available, affordable, resolves immediate problems and creates better income opportunities. Farmers do pay for services if of a good quality and specific to their immediate problems. These are signs that a market for private quality advice is forming and might become sustainable.
- On the other hand, subsidies continue to be required for extension services. New models and mechanisms of shared advisory services delivered by public and private services have to be tried out. Services should be complementary and financing be mixed; public funding (donor agencies, governments) for basic services (or those with industry wide benefits, such as invasive pest management), with private funding for more specialised advice.
- Importance of advice and extensions services has come back on the agenda of the Kosovo Government. Efforts to strengthen the public service are under way and increasing knowledge of the public advisers will create more opportunities for farmers to access appropriate and high quality advice. Thereby the priority, which the Kosovo government attributes to agricultural extension, is a decisive factor.
- Sustainability: Time will show whether sustainability of IP and advisory services has been reached, there are positive signs that the change brought about by the project will sustain. Nevertheless, many challenges remain.



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HORTICULTURAL PROMOTION
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