



SUCCESS STORY

Raspberry Farming Builds Wealth for Family

Reliable income helps retire debt, grow savings

Kosovo farmer Bashkim Qerimi's bountiful raspberry harvests have inspired his family and neighbors to grow the berries.



Kosovo farmer Bashkim Qerimi displays the sort of bountiful raspberry harvest that's inspired his family and neighbors to also grow the berries.

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August 2016 — Despite an early success growing raspberries, Bashkim and Florija Qerimi grew their startup cautiously.

In 2015, during an overwhelmingly fruitful first season, they sold six tons of raspberries, generating an income of about \$12,400. For their second season, the couple quickly expanded their farm by more than fourfold, to 3.2 acres. As a result, they now expect to bring in a larger harvest — and greater profit.

"The first season I was afraid to leave my job as a construction worker. Florija managed the entire work of planting 0.3 hectare (0.74 acre) of raspberries in that first year," Bashkim Qerimi says.

Soon after the family increased their farm size, Bashkim quit his construction job and began farming fulltime alongside his wife.

USAID through Agriculture Growth and Rural Opportunities program, works to raise incomes among Kosovo's majority rural population. Fostering growth in the small Southeastern European nation's raspberry industry represents one such targeted approach. The industry, while small, holds great potential as a source of fresh and frozen fruit for the domestic, regional and broader European markets.

The Qerimi family has already retired all debt incurred in getting their raspberry farm started. They've also seen their standard of living improve, and have even begun setting aside some savings.

"All this from farming, and from one raspberry harvest," Bashkim says. "I am proud to say that it was worth leaving my construction job, diving into the farming business and giving it 100 percent."

The family enterprise has put others in their village, located in north-eastern Kosovo, to work. Bashkim and Florija employ 12 local women during the harvest, paying them 10 euro cents more per kilogram picked than do other growers, rewarding them for the hard work the couple has experienced firsthand.

The Qerimis' three children also pitch in, but on a limited basis as school takes precedence. "I have a hard time keeping the kids away from the fields," Bashkim says laughing.

The family's success has moved friends, neighbors and family — among them, four of Bashkim's brothers — to begin growing raspberries in the area.

"Seeing our success, the entire village has followed in our footsteps," says Bashkim. "They say I inspire them with what I have done for my family, and I am starting to believe that. I am so happy and proud to have entered the business of agriculture with everything I have."

Cultivating raspberries in Kosovo provides increasing opportunities for job creation — no other industry in the country is generating and sustaining this level of employment. The 1,000 hectares already cultivated have created more than 3000 full-time jobs nationwide.

The five-year Agriculture for Growth and Rural Opportunities program, which started in 2015, provided the Qerimi family with technical assistance in establishing their raspberry farm.