



## SUCCESS STORY

### Increased Drying Capacity Yields Profits for Women Farmers in Kosovo

Value added increases farm income among rural poor



Sylhane stands proudly next to her new solar drying tunnel for her collected MAPs, provided by USAID.

“In the near future, we expect an increase in cultivation, wherever we have land available, an increase in wild collection, and ultimately an increase in sales and profits.” ~ Sylhane Ramadani, lead woman farmer, Gotovushë, Kosovo.

January, 2017—In Sylhane Ramadani’s village of Gotovushë/Gotovuša, flowers are as much about giving as they are about getting.

To be sure, villagers in this multiethnic and mountainous corner of southern Kosovo still gift garden-grown blossoms to friends and neighbors. Increasingly, however, women farmers are growing, processing and selling the flowers to aggregators for export to Europe. As a result of the sales, women farmers in this heavily rural region receive much welcomed additional income.

“We have come to realize that we should be selling what we grow, and we can be making real profit from our work,” says Ramadani, 45. “Why give away for free what I work to grow, when I can secure an income for my family?”

For years, women in the region have collected wild-harvested and home-grown medicinal herbs, including mallow. The flower is a common ingredient in many shampoos, face creams and skin lotions. When sold fresh, the flowers had poor margins, selling for roughly 1 Euro per kilogram.

To improve the situation, USAID supplied 50 women farmers with simple solar drying tunnels. The tunnels resemble a greenhouse with black plastic film walls. The tunnel’s black plastic absorbs the sun’s rays, which heats the interior. The warmth, trapped within, accelerates the drying process. Multiple shelves furnish each tunnel with 645 square feet (60 square meters) of drying space.

With mallow, it can take just three to four days to dry the flowers. “All the buyer needs to do is to immediately package them and prepare them for export,” explains Ramadani. The value added by drying translates into much healthier margins. The women can sell dried flowers for over 5 Euros per kilogram, says Samir Riza, a medicinal and aromatic plant expert with USAID’s Agricultural Growth and Rural Opportunities (AGRO) program.

“The mindset has really changed in our villages,” says Ramadani, who leads a local multiethnic women’s cooperative. “Women are more confident—they are now working, growing, collecting, drying and selling their goods for profit.”

USAID’s intervention has added more over 32,000 square feet (3,000 square meters) of drying capacity to the region. In addition to mallow seeds, USAID also furnished the women farmers with marigold, cornflower and ornamental sunflower seeds. The crops all can be farmed intensively, an advantage for local women who tend small and fragmented plots. The women also received training on crop management, including on how to pick delicate blossoms without harming them.

A local firm, Agroprodukt Sh.P.K., buys nearly everything the women can grow and dry, exporting it on to Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The firm is a strategic partner of USAID in its efforts to develop Kosovo's medicinal and aromatic plant industry. The effort dovetails with a broader USAID goal of increasing incomes among Kosovo's majority rural population.

For example, the dried flowers and other herbs are earning women farmers per month in season about 200 to 300 Euros—an amount that approaches the nation's average monthly wage.

“This is additional income for our families, and that is welcomed by the whole household,” Ramadani says. “In the near future, we expect an increase in cultivation, wherever we have land available, an increase in wild collection, and ultimately an increase in sales and profits.”