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AZERBAIJAN

SUCCESS STORY

Hazelnuts Meet Global Quality Standards

New equipment helps hazelnut processors boost production quality



Photo: IRC/Yuliya Gureyeva

Alijan Alijanov shows the hazelnut trees that his grandfather planted in his family's garden near Zagatala, Azerbaijan.

USAID's program helped the two hazelnut processors meet their clients' quality requirements, increase their production capacity, and double their sales volume.

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While touring the hazelnut garden planted by his grandfather, Alijan Alijanov explains, "Several generations in my family grew hazelnuts. But when I decided to process hazelnuts on an industrial scale, I found out things are not that simple. A market economy has strong requirements, and one of the key elements is product quality." With help from USAID, Alijan brought his production facility in line with the quality standards he needs to compete. Now, Alijan is proud not only of his garden, but also of his production facility.

Alijan's hazelnut facility, built near Zagatala, Azerbaijan was struggling during the 1990s to procure large volumes of good hazelnuts. A nearby facility, run by Bayram Zukanov, had the same problem. In addition, their limited production capabilities made it hard to produce high-quality hazelnuts. The processing was slow, and the nuts encountered excessive moisture, which can allow toxins to build. Because of these problems, both Alijan and Bayram ended up defaulting on contracts with large buyers.

In 2005, Alijan and Bayram learned about and applied to a USAID-funded business assistance project. Business advisors reviewed their situation and addressed the quality issue in two steps. First, they identified weaknesses in local hazelnut farming methods. If local farmer produced better nuts, Alijan and Bayram could buy supplies locally. The project launched an information campaign to help farmers improve cultivation and pre-processing methods. Second, the project helped Alijan and Bayram install metal drying tanks that dry hazelnuts more effectively than the outdated chambers they were using.

Today, their facilities are processing high quality hazelnuts faster. They have reduced the risks related to high humidity levels, eliminating toxicity and rotting. The new drying capacity processes 40 percent more hazelnuts every day. In addition, the two facilities buy more hazelnuts from local farmers, providing the farmers with income and the facilities with a secure line of supply. Alijan and Bayram now have little trouble meeting their clients' quality standards. They have increased their production capacity and their sales volumes have doubled. They now have big plans for the future; little by little, they hope to make Azerbaijan hazelnuts recognized worldwide for their quality, beauty, and superb taste.