



SUCCESS STORY

Giving a New Face to Dairy Packaging

Local cooperatives boost small businesses and improve trade opportunities



Photo: USAID/Kristina Stefanova

A worker handles milk at a dairy that is a member of Macedonia's cheese and lamb cluster.

“We are steadily heading in the right direction,” says dairy owner Stoika Stojkovska.

In mid-2003, the Buchen Kozyak dairy in Kumanovo, Macedonia, sold most of its cheese to restaurants, and packaged its milk and yogurt with plain, unmarked labels.

Today, the dairy has new equipment to make several new types of cheeses, its products are easily recognized by their colorful new packaging, and its sales have risen by 40 percent.

“We have so many new plans,” said Predrag Cvetkovic, marketing manager of Buchen Kozyak. “We want to be the leader in Macedonia five years from now.”

None of this would have happened — or happened this quickly — if the dairy had not joined Macedonia's lamb and cheese co-op, one of five industry cooperatives supported by USAID. Each co-op has about 60 members and identifies 10 goals for the group in areas like promotion and branding to cooperatively boost local, and thus national, business.

A marketing manager for a Boston dairy spent two months at Buchen Kozyak to teach about better cheese packaging, and using these new techniques, in the summer of 2004, Buchen Kozyak participated in a major wine and cheese festival, where 1,600 bottles of wine and two tons of cheese were sold. Many participants ran out of products. “We are steadily heading in the right direction,” said owner Stoika Stojkovska.

Macedonia did not export any cheese before the lamb and cheese co-op was formed. But since the co-op was established the country has exported 148 tons of feta and various types of yellow cheese, including kashkaval, to Albania, Australia, and the United States.

Other co-ops formed with USAID assistance focus on tourism, wine, apparel and information technology. In 2004, the tourism co-op, with the support of USAID, hosted a dozen foreign tour operators on a five-day trip to cultural and historic sites throughout Macedonia. As a result, a British tour company is including Macedonia in its 2005 catalogue, and a Colorado-based bike-tour company expressed an interest in leading a trip there in 2005.