



Co-op Gives Pig Farmers Hope For Better Future

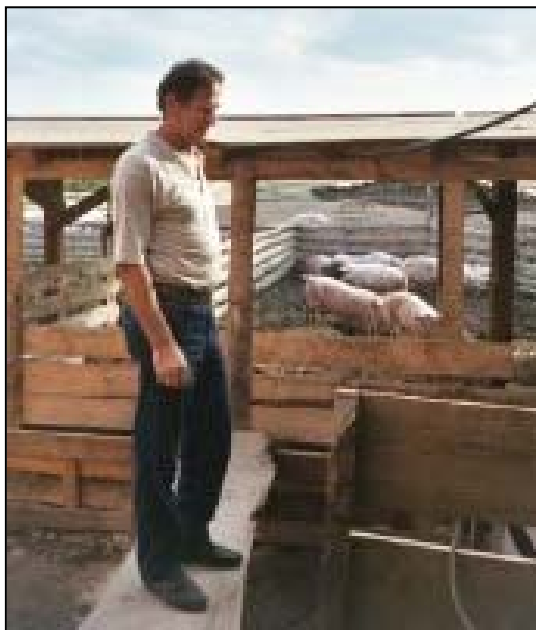


Photo: USAID/Anne Marie DiNardo

Anton Hetmanek at his pig farm in Croatia.

“I am optimistic that the business will develop and I expect more funding. It is difficult to come to market and build a network of buyers. If this is done successfully, running the co-op will be easier. I have two sons and a daughter. It is important to provide a home for them - I think of them and need to be optimistic.”

- Anton Hetmanek, Co-op Founder

The 1990's war in Croatia devastated lives and homes. Anton Hetmanek, from the small town of Pakrac, worked prior to the war in a wood processing factory. The factory was devastated by the war and it was evident that the old factory would not be revitalized. Hetmanek needed to support his family and turned his future toward breeding pigs. He participated in a USAID-funded training program for continuing education on farm management held in the United States.

After completing the course, Hetmanek helped found the Bagen Cooperative made up of seventeen family farms. The cooperative provided better security for farmers and helped them obtain bank loans to expand their breeding and production. With a loan from USAID, the co-op was able to increase its farm from thirty to a couple hundred pigs. USAID helped link Bagen to buyers in the market throughout Croatia and provided training with farming experts.

Bagen now sells pork to Dalmatian smoked ham producers in Drnis, who are willing to pay more for the quality needed to create an authentic and respected Croatian brand. The Bagen cooperative has become a respected pork supplier, ensuring the quality standards needed for large food chains and meat processors are met. The Bagen cooperative is an example of how people in war-affected communities can join forces and create a better life for their families while contributing to the economic revitalization of their town.

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