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PUBLICIZING FOOD PRODUCTS' GEOGRAPHIC ORIGIN CAN BOOST SALES, EXPERTS SAY AT BELGRADE CONFERENCE

BELGRADE – Serbian food producers could profit significantly by touting their products' point of origin, experts from Italy, Switzerland and Serbia said today at a conference at the Sava Center in New Belgrade.

The use of a product's Geographic Indication of Origin (GIO) is a strong selling point they noted, citing the popularity of Champagne, prosciutto de Parma and New Zealand lamb.

Here in Serbia, there is Leskovacki ajvar, Ariljska malina, Fotoski kupus, Homoljski med, Sjenicki sudzuk, and Sjenicki and Zlatarski sir, to name a few traditional products that would benefit on the global market from a certificate bearing their origin, the speakers said.

"When a product is officially labeled "Champagne" or "Florida oranges" we can be sure that we are getting the high quality and taste that their Geographical Indication of Origin promise. And since we are willing to pay a premium for these products, this is clearly an incentive for producers," said USAID Mission Director Susan K. Fritz, whose USAID Agribusiness Project is supporting the GIO effort in Serbia.

Branka Totic, the director of the Serbian Intellectual Property Institute, said that her organization has been focusing on the protection of GIO products since 1981 and that it has protected 58 GIO products to date, 48 of which were local.

The aim of the Origin and Tradition Conference was to build awareness in Serbia about the certification of GIO products and to stress the importance of cooperation among producers and food associations to market their wares on the global market.

The conference was organized by the Serbian Ministry of Agriculture, Trade, Forestry and Water Management, the Intellectual Property Institute of Serbia, the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs of Switzerland, the Swiss Institute for Intellectual Property; the Belgrade consultancy SEEDDEV, and the USAID Agribusiness Project.

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Since 2001 USAID has invested more than \$662.5 million to stimulate economic growth, strengthen the justice system, and promote good governance in Serbia.

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