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Jelena Popovic, +381-65 306-6750

E-mail: [jpopovic@usaid.gov](mailto:jpopovic@usaid.gov)

### **Sandzak Food Processing Companies Receive Halal Certification with USAID Support**

**Novi Sad (May 15):** Nine food processing companies from Sandzak: Giljeva, Sjenicanka, Sandzak Komerc, Fass, Milkop, Turkovic-Lav, Polimka, Ljin, and Zornic - received their Halal certificates from the Serbian Halal Certification Agency, the official certifying body for Serbia. Certificates were awarded by Susan Fritz, USAID Mission Director in Serbia at a special ceremony held on May 15 at Hall One, Novi Sad Agricultural Fair.

Halal certification verifies that products meet Islamic dietary guidelines and they have been made in accordance with Islamic law. Attaining Halal Certification marks an important step for these Sandzak companies in their efforts to enter and compete on the global Halal market. With 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide, Halal is a growing global food market estimated at more than \$500 billion a year. The companies receiving certificates hope to replicate the success of USAID Economic Security Project partner Turkovic, a Sjenica meat processing company, which obtained Halal certification in 2010 and has since increased export sales by 40 percent since entering the Turkish food market.

Training to qualify for certification was provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through its Economic Security Project. The companies shared the costs involved in meeting standards and getting certified with USAID.

The certification will also help companies increase sales in Sandzak region, a market of a half-million Muslims with a growing interest in foods produced by companies possessing Halal certification. The potential market for Halal expands to 5 million customers in bordering countries alone. Tapping into this market could increase sales and help drive faster economic growth in Sandzak communities. The certification process was a part of the USAID Economic Security Project's plan to organize a group of Sandzak food producers to work cooperatively and exhibit their products at the Novi Sad Agriculture Fair, the largest agricultural fair in South East Europe.

Highlighting unique food products from the mountains of Pester, Golija and Kopaonik, three food-producing companies and two associations (representing the regions' cheese and meat producers) displayed their products in a new collective exhibit at the Novi Sad Agricultural Trade Fair. The new regional brand identities were developed using an ES Project grant, and was the first joint effort by the Pester Food Association and several of the regions' food companies (Milkop, Zornic-Mlekara Tutin, Giljeva, and Sjenicki Sir) to permanently establish a Sandzak regional food cluster. Following in the footsteps of the Sandzak textile association ASSTEX, the new food cluster hopes to improve the economic outlook for food producers in the region, which struggle with some of the country's highest unemployment rates. The Novi Sad Agricultural Fair runs from May 12 to May 18.

USAID's Economic Security Project provides management, marketing and sales training for 137 small- and medium-sized Sandzak and South Serbia companies. The USAID project also supports companies' attendance at domestic and international trade fairs in order to help companies to explore new markets and expand sales. Since 2008, trade fair attendance from USAID's Economic Security Project has helped companies from South Serbia and Sandzak generate over \$13 million in new sales and to enter new markets in the region as well as in Germany, Russia, Poland, Belarus and the Czech Republic.

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For additional information, please contact Mr Tibor Jona at the USAID ES Project Communications Office at [tibor\\_jona@dai.com](mailto:tibor_jona@dai.com) or (063) 215-651.

For more information on the USAID ES Project, please visit <http://www.economicsecurity.rs>

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