Assistant FAO Representative in Armenia awarded with the Gold Medal of the Ministry of Agriculture

Sixteen people, including farmers, agricultural specialists, representatives of organizations operating in the agrarian sector and employees of the Ministry of Agriculture, were awarded gold medals by the Ministry of Agriculture of Armenia for their achievements in agriculture. Assistant FAO Representative in Armenia Gayane Nasoyan was also among the proud awardees. The Gold Medal was presented to Nasoyan for her outstanding contribution to the development of Armenian agriculture. Awardees received the medals from the Deputy Minister of Agriculture Garnik Petrosyan at a ceremony in the Ministry on 27 May.

"Agriculture is a difficult sector to work in, and not everyone dares to step in, stay and build up their future in this sector. Fortunately, there are courageous people who can see that future and are ready to live it, to create and do good," said Petrosyan. He congratulated the awardees, thanked them for the work they do, wishing them greater achievements in the future.

Gayane Nasoyan was appointed Assistant FAO Representative in Armenia in April 2010. She promotes FAO’s work in the Republic of Armenia through the advocacy of the Organization’s mandate, programmes and strategic priorities. She assists government counterparts, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and other partners in accessing FAO’s vast knowledge resources and facilitates collaborations with them.

The Ministry of Agriculture has been a solid partner for FAO in Armenia. Since becoming a Member Nation of the Organization in 1993, Armenia has received FAO support in implementing various development and emergency projects, aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and improving food security in the country.
FAO helps raise journalists’ awareness on food security and nutrition topics in Armenia

A two-day intensive training on raising awareness of journalists in the field of food security and nutrition was held in Armenia on 16-17 February 2019. The training program was initiated and developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in close collaboration with the National Institute of Health of the Ministry of Health and the Food Security division of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Armenia.

A total of 15 journalists who report about agriculture, health and social protection at national TV, radio and in newspapers and via social media attended the training.

The training included lectures and work in groups covering the topics on food security, food safety, micronutrient deficiencies and other relevant issues for Armenia. Indeed the training focused on the need of disseminating accurate and relevant information on the topics, thus promoting improved knowledge of journalists for reaching a better quality of the content news based on reliable sources.

During the training, participants were provided with useful information and data at global and national scale which helped increase awareness on food security and nutrition. “Addressing hunger and food insecurity issues is a key priority to ensure healthy lives and promoting well-being as well as equitable quality education across the population for all ages”, - said Zaruhi Beglaryan, the FAO project coordinator in Armenia.

The attending journalists expressed their satisfaction about the training and the information provided, demonstrating their growing interest to learn through active debates and raise questions to the expert trainers. Participants were also informed about relevant information sources, which would help them to produce proven news and articles in the future. “Producing reliable news is part of our mandate and we look forward to further insightful information exchanges”, - said Naira Badalian, journalist for ArmInfo News Agency.

This training was part of the awareness raising campaign in Armenia under the FAO project “Developing Capacity for Strengthening Food Security and Nutrition in Selected Countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia”, funded by the Russian Federation. The project is to strategically mediate the challenges in the country and promote cross-sectoral collaboration by providing adequate capacity to effectively pursue and manage coherence between agriculture, nutrition, health, education and social protection sectors.
Armenia harmonizes forest monitoring system

In recent years, Armenia has gone through severe structural changes that have affected the forest sector. Forests, which were formerly under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, are now the responsibility of the Ministry of Nature Protection, together with areas dedicated to nature conservation.

These changes allow for a harmonized and more efficient system for forest monitoring and management, and they create momentum for finalizing a national-level set of criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. The set, which has been developed in recent years through a multi-stakeholder process, addresses forest-related topics such as the extent of the forest area, biological diversity, socio-economic impacts, and productive and protective functions. It strives to transparently measure Armenia’s progress in achieving national forestry targets, including the reduction of illegal logging and the protection of forests and forest lands, and thus it supports evidence-based policy making. The set of criteria and indicators also can go along with the development of a new national forestry program.

On 20–22 February 2019, more than 30 national forest sector experts gathered in Armenia’s capital, Yerevan, to review and finalize the criteria and indicator set at a workshop organized by UNECE and FAO. Armenia is part of the project “Accountability Systems for Sustainable Forest Management for the Caucasus and Central Asia,” funded through the United Nations Development Account, which supports several countries in this process.

“The results of this workshop can make a significant contribution to the positive changes that have taken place in Armenia aiming to increase accountability and transparency in the forest sector,” said Vahe Matsakyan, deputy chairperson of the Committee of Forests in Armenia’s Ministry of Nature Protection.

In 2017, Armenia ratified the Paris Agreement, committing, among other things, to increase its forest cover to 20.1 percent by 2050.

For several years, remote sensing technologies have been used to monitor forests in Armenia. As a result, information about forests is regularly updated and accessible, allowing for the drawing of conclusions about the country’s historical forest situation. This information is used, inter alia, to monitor and manage forest fires and changes in forest areas and ecosystem health.

“It is crucial to create a functioning forest monitoring system to allow an assessment of the progress and quality of restoration efforts,” said Ekrem Yazici, deputy head of the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section.
**FAO supports food loss and waste reduction in Armenia**

Some 40 participants gathered to discuss and validate a strategic roadmap for food loss and waste prevention and reduction in Armenia that was developed on the basis of participants’ recommendations and the results of the field studies.

In Armenia, just as in all other countries, food loss and waste unnecessarily and significantly contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and to climate change, by producing, processing and distributing food that is eventually discarded.

The project assists Armenia in developing and implementing national strategies for food loss and waste reduction, tailored to the specific needs of the country and aligned with existing national strategies and policies on agricultural development, food security, climate change mitigation, and others. Food loss and waste has implications on the food production sector, and food and nutrition security in Armenia through inefficiencies in the food value chains. That result in reduced availability of micronutrient-rich foods, such as fruits and vegetables, reduced income of smallholder farmers, who are major food producers, and increased food prices, affecting urban consumers.

According to Robert van Otterdijk, FAO agro-industry officer, the most pressing issues to be addressed in the country are the lack of accurate data on food loss and waste; unawareness of the complexity of the issue, its impact and causes and of the implications it may have for food value chain actors, consumers, service providers and the environment. In the course of the project, FAO assessed the food loss and waste situation in the selected food supply chains, interviewed farmers, processors and retailers involved to understand the causes and impacts of these losses.

During the workshop, the scale, causes and impacts of food loss in Armenia were presented. Participants included representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Nature Protection, international and non-governmental organizations, research institutions, academia, professional organizations and the private sector. They talked through the proposed policy mechanisms and other recommendations to facilitate implementation of the strategy, and discussed opportunities for voluntary action by the private sector. As a result, a national roadmap for food loss and waste prevention and reduction was validated.

“As with other complex, multifaceted issues, the fight against food loss and waste requires a broad collaboration of all actors in the food supply chain to better identify, measure, understand and find solutions to the problem,” emphasized Gayane Nasoyan, Assistant FAO Representative in Armenia. “Today’s workshop provides an opportunity for all partners to agree on a coherent strategic approach to food loss and waste reduction.”

Later, a regional communication and awareness campaign will be launched, and also a regional network of public and private entities active in food loss and waste reduction established. Both are aimed to improve sharing of information and resources, and collaboration in tackling the problem.
Armenia improves feed supply and processing in its dairy sector

Based on previous FAO studies, the dairy sector in Armenia lacks sufficient quality feed supply to help improve milk production and contribute to the country’s overall economic and social development. Current feeding practices, in particular those of small-scale producers, were also found inadequate, limiting productivity and farming conditions.

The workshop, organized jointly by FAO, the Center for Agribusiness and Rural Development and the International Center for Agribusiness Research and Education, brought together interested parties of the dairy sector with technical experts to discuss a survey results on consumer needs and habits. Based on the key factors influencing dairy cow milk productivity, situation of the dairy processing sector, consumer preferences and the international market potential for Armenian dairy products, the participants will elaborate recommendations for an investor roadmap for dairy value chain. Collected information and solicited feedback of the workshop will be used to develop the investment strategy and roadmap that can guide the Government of Armenia and the donor community to improve feed resource, enhance processing, and a market-oriented dairy sector in Armenia.

The event, held on 12 March 2019, was part of an FAO project that started in 2017 intended to have a broad impact on the Armenian dairy sector, complementing other activities in the dairy cattle and animal health sector. “The industry's growth and competitiveness are constrained by low productivity and seasonality in milk production, low quality of milk, as well as high fragmentation of the supply chain. The aim of the FAO support is to develop a strategy to spur the dairy industry into a viable path for a sustainable and inclusive development in Armenia”, said Cheng Fang, FAO economist and project team leader.

For the survey, a total of 400 consumer family household were involved in four cities (Yerevan, Abovyan, Gyumri, and Vanadzor). Also, a consumer preference analysis was carried out; 20 dairy processing companies were in-depth interviewed and the qualitative and quantitative information collected was used to analyze processors’ production capacity and utilization, milk collection, distribution, and market strategy. Over 400 farming households were interviewed by exhaustive questionnaires to investigate the feeding and factors affecting milk productivity and market access.

The group of more than 60 people included representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Statistical Service, the Food Safety Inspection Authority; the Armenian National Agrarian University, service providers and suppliers, farmers at all scales, processors, local communities, cooperatives, as well as from the donor community, such as the European Union, the World Bank, and the Austrian Development Agency. The project takes a value chain development approach as it works at both the top and the bottom levels of the value chain. It provides a strategy to increase productivity through improved feed for dairy cattle; identify the market potential, and provide an investment roadmap to improve the markets for the various milk products. Cheng Fang noted that FAO plans to establish a partnership in Armenia to strengthen the capacity and agricultural innovation for feeding sector and processing sector development.
FAO, CARD work with local businesses to improve the dairy sector in Armenia and Georgia

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Center for Agribusiness and Rural Development (CARD) organized a business to business (B2B) event in Tbilisi which focused on enhancing market linkages in the dairy sectors of Armenia and Georgia. More than 50 farmers, veterinarians and agricultural input suppliers from Georgia, Armenia and other countries attended.

The overall goal of the B2B event was to present best farming practices and good examples of inputs and technologies to Armenian and Georgian farmers and to create market linkages between the two countries' value chain operators and international suppliers. FAO works with local private sector companies in both countries, helping to connect entities with complementary strengths in order to improve access to technology and information exchanges along the dairy and meat value chain.

The event, held on 20 March 2019, focused on the challenges facing the animal husbandry sectors in Armenia and Georgia, and on opportunities for strengthening these sectors through better animal feed, cow comfort technologies and developments in genetics. It also offered participants from Georgia and Armenia a unique opportunity to meet and exchange views, experiences and know-how on these areas of expertise. Nutrimax, DeLaval, Alta Genetics, Maisadour and other companies participated in the event, presenting their products, equipment and technologies.

Last September in Tsaghkadzor, Armenia, a meeting was organized to support the local private sector in Armenia and Georgia in their engagement on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals with a focus on food security and nutrition. Following that, FAO was requested to facilitate further exchanges between key local private sector actors of Georgia and Armenia. The B2B event was the first follow-up event of its kind to this request.

Magali Herranz, FAO programme officer, highlighted the importance of supporting local business development to address challenges within the dairy value chain. “We hope that both, Armenia and Georgia will be enriched from exchanging experiences and lessons learned through this B2B meeting which will pave the way for further collaboration between relevant actors from the two countries,” Herranz said. “Every company, be it large or small, has the potential to make a notable contribution to inclusive and shared economic, social and environmentally sustainable progress.”

Representatives of line ministries, other governmental agencies and partner organizations of both countries also participated in the one-day workshop.

Since December 2017, the CARD Foundation - with the support of FAO - has carried out several research projects to assess the dairy sector in Armenia and Georgia, in collaboration with the Georgian Farmers Association. These studies have helped to both identify gaps in the dairy production value chains and propose improvement mechanisms. Events like this, which allow Armenian and Georgian farmers to meet and exchange experiences, are part of the programme to strengthen the dairy sector.
The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Center for Agribusiness and Rural Development (CARD) organized a four-day study tour in May 2019 for Georgian and Moldavian participants, focused on enhancing exchange of knowledge and experience among farmers and veterinarians operating in dairy sector. The visit aimed at showing best practices in milk production, processing and farmer support.

The study tour covered north and south of Armenia and included destinations such as small and large-scale farms, dairy processing plants, various Farm Service Centers as well as sheep and goat breeding farms, which have their own milk processing facilities.

The tour was followed by the discussions among the participants. Eleven Georgian farmers and veterinarians, and two representatives from Moldova participated in the study tour.

“During the experience exchange program we had a chance to visit different farms in Armenia, examine cheese production process and pig genetic centre services. We had discussions with the participants and Armenian farmers about the potential development of the dairy sector in Georgia and Armenia; also, we addressed sector-related questions to our Armenian colleagues. This visit was a chance to see the dairy sector in real life and to draw parallels with the sector in our country”, said Merab Chkhartishvili, a farmer from Georgia. “I will be happy if there will be a continuation to the program so that we can cooperate and develop joint products with Armenian colleagues. This kind of visits serve as platforms for farmers to share knowledge and experience, identify sector related problems and jointly come up with solutions”, added Chkhartishvili.
Food safety remains a priority for Armenia

New project is designed to help relevant authorities and food business operators improve food safety, animal and plant health

In Armenia, a two-year project on strengthening food safety and animal health in risk assessment and management has kicked off. It should assist the government among others in conducting risk assessment, developing controls and risk management options, and improving food safety management systems for food business operators. The project was launched with a three-day inception workshop from 4 to 6 June. Participants discussed how risk analysis principles could be applied in practice effectively to suit Armenia’s strategic objectives and strengthen institutional knowledge on animal health, food safety and plant health management.

Thirty-five officials and specialists from line departments of the Food Safety Inspectorate Body, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment, the Food Safety Risk Assessment and Analysis Scientific Centre, The Informational – Analytical Centre for Risk Assessment of Food Chain, Agrarian University, together with representatives of academia, research institutes, food business operators and civil society organizations participated in the workshop.

The country is committed to set up a risk assessment capability and adopt approaches on system development for risk assessment, management and communication, in line with international good practices and principles. “Food safety means having diligent producers providing safe food, consumers sufficiently informed of their rights, and an inspection system supporting food businesses not to harm consumers,” said Georgi Avetisyan, head of the Food Safety Inspectorate Body.

The FAO project will provide assistance on identifying and improving the evidence and data sources on food safety, animal and plant health risks, implementing risk assessment to determine food safety, animal health and plant health priorities. It should help develop appropriate controls and risk management to avoid unsafe food and movement of animals. Also, capacities of food business operators on food safety management systems, and inspection services on risk categorization should be improved. “Strengthening risk based approaches in food safety, animal health and plant health will enable Armenia to optimally use available resources to target issues of greatest concern,” emphasized Mary Kenny, food safety and consumer protection officer at FAO. “The project will support the Food Safety Inspectorate Body to achieve its vision of strong and effective institutional frameworks, tailored decisions based on evidence, and well-functioning work processes. The One Health approach will be applied to assess and manage risks which may occur at the interface between humans-animals and plants.”

Armenia’s Development Strategy for 2014-2025 aims at the development of the food and agriculture sector by focusing on improving agricultural productivity, marketability of agricultural products and value addition through processing. Recently updated Government Program 2019 prioritizes food safety. It foresees improving the level of food safety; ensuring safe and proper procedures are in food production, processing and distribution; establishing effective system for prevention of animal and plant diseases; improving competitiveness in foreign and domestic markets.
FAO workshop puts food security, nutrition and social protection in focus

A three-day high-level workshop on the complex and interlinked issues of food security, nutrition and social protection was held in Tsaghkadzor. Key government officials discussed developments and implementation of respective national programmes in Armenia. The workshop was organized in close collaboration with the Government of Armenia, supported by the Eurasian Centre for Food Security under the Moscow State University.

The training, held on 6-8 June 2019, aimed at increasing the understanding of food security, nutrition and social protection concepts in accordance with international standards, with the ultimate goal of improving policy decision-making and effective communication for public awareness raising. It also aimed at expanding the knowledge and strengthening the monitoring and evaluation skills of parties involved in the implementation of food security and nutrition related programmes. “The Government considers programmes that integrate social protection with food security and nutrition very important and is very willing to learn from this experience when it comes to poverty reduction, and to expand when possible,” said Zhanna Andreasyan, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs of Armenia. “We are currently in the process of reviewing the existing system of state allowance, and one of the options we are considering is to implement a programme that has this “Cash+” model which allows families to receive more comprehensive support and to truly create and sustain a stable source of income.”

An estimated 16 percent of households were classified as food insecure in 2015 – the number has almost doubled since the 2008 global financial crisis. Food and nutrition security and poverty reduction is therefore high on the common agenda of FAO and Armenia. In relation with agricultural national development plans and strategies as well as FAO global regional objectives, this issue is one out of the three priority areas of the current FAO-Armenia Country Programming Framework. The Government of Armenia has already adopted a set of documents reflecting the country’s agricultural development priorities, including food security and nutrition.

“Food security is of strategic importance for the Government of Armenia, and the Ministry of Agriculture has developed several policy initiatives aimed at ensuring the food security in the country,” noted Ashkhen Shirvanyan, head of Food Safety department of the Ministry of Agriculture. “We are glad that the workshop has presented the opportunity to get acquainted with the FAO approach on food security, social protection and rural development.”

More than 35 government officials, representatives from line ministries and relevant agencies, key national experts and other interested parties attended.

The event was part of the FAO project “Developing capacity for strengthening food security and nutrition in selected countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia,” funded by the Russian Federation. The project is to strategically mediate the challenges in the country and promote cross-sectoral collaboration by providing adequate capacity to effectively pursue and manage coherence between agriculture, nutrition, health, education and social protection sectors.
About FAO
The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Our goal is to achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. With over 194 member states, FAO works in over 130 countries worldwide. We believe that everyone can play a part in ending hunger.

FAO in Armenia
Armenia is a member of FAO since 1993. The country office was opened in Yerevan in 2004. The guiding framework for the Armenia-FAO collaboration is the Country Programme Framework (CPF). The current CPF for the period of 2016-2020 sets out three government priority areas to guide the FAO partnership and support the Government of Armenia (GoA). It addresses technical, social and economic aspects, recognizing and addressing the needs of women and men at different stages of life, and the needs of the most disadvantaged.

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