



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# Croatia and FAO

## *Partnering to achieve sustainable agricultural and rural development*

Since 1993, FAO has played an active role in supporting Croatia's national development plans and projects aimed at increasing agricultural productivity and improving the country's food security. Technical assistance has focused on development of Croatia's agriculture sector with the aim of improving rural livelihoods, increasing productivity and contributing to sustainable growth of the economy.

### **Developing protected status for food products**

Under a joint project run by FAO and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (ERBD), mandarins from the Neretva Valley and sausage from the Baranja region in Croatia have won protected Geographical Indication (GI) status. GI status is granted to goods that have a specific geographical origin, and the GI label is an effective way to communicate quality, safety and tradition to consumers. GI status can support rural development by increasing market competitiveness as well as preserving cultural heritage and adding value to local products.

With the support of the Croatian agribusiness company Agrokor and the country's Ministry of Agriculture, the project organized groups of farmers to come together to create product-specific standards, and the GIs were officially registered over the course of just three years. Their registration provides the opportunity for local producers to market a niche quality product more effectively and to gain access to wider distribution networks and European markets thanks to increased brand recognition.

The next step for Croatia is to ensure the recognition of their GIs by the European Commission so they are protected on the European market as well. The Ministry of Agriculture will oversee this process so the Neretva mandarin and Baranjski kulen can be enjoyed abroad and financial returns to farmers can grow.

### **Unleashing the potential of aquaculture in the Western Balkans**

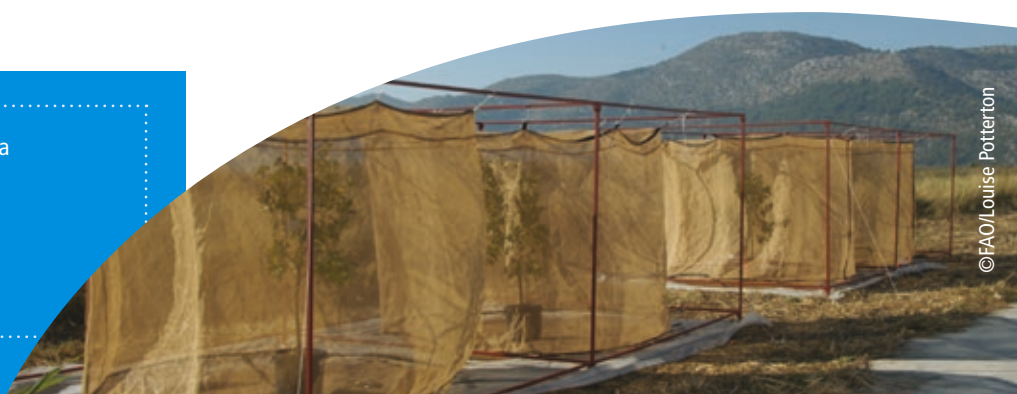
Aquaculture has great potential in the Western Balkans for three reasons: vast expanses of high-quality water resources, close proximity to large markets in the European Union, and skilled yet inexpensive labour. A two-year FAO project helped five countries develop their capacity to meet international standards for trade in live fish and other aquatic animals.

The project – a collaboration between FAO, the ministries of agriculture and other ministries from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – accomplished its main objective of improving the countries' abilities to comply with international standards on aquatic animal health. In total, five national workshops and six regional workshops were conducted to share knowledge and generate support from the private sector and aquaculture producers. More than 120 people were trained on various aspects of aquatic animal health. A surveillance manual, a diagnostic manual, and emergency preparedness and response guidelines were produced, and a regional website was updated – all of which will serve as permanent resources for aquaculture development.

Since the start of the project in 2013, a strong national and regional network was built throughout the aquaculture industry and the national institutions that hosted the workshops demonstrated a strong interest in the project.

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## Strengthening agriculture and rural development policies

In the past years, the South-Eastern European region (SEE) has made substantial progress towards stability, economic reforms, and integration with European structures. The agricultural situation has gradually improved in most Western Balkan countries, but many steps still remain.

*"Strengthened government capacities can facilitate a swift response to agriculture and rural development."*

José Graziano da Silva,  
FAO Director-General

An FAO project aims at building closer coordination and a stable relationship between policy makers and academics across the SEE countries, which is essential for an effective administrative system and an accelerated

accession process. The project gathers the Ministries of Agriculture from the participants – which include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – as well as academic and research institutions and universities with the capacity for agro-economic analytics in the SEE region.

The project has been developed in close collaboration with the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG) and in discussion with representatives of some of the major academic institutions in the region. It provides a functional network between the academics and their analytical tools to increase the effectiveness of the national and European Commission support measures for agriculture and rural development.

The overall objective is to support policy discussions in the agro and food sectors between the responsible institutions and the academics, and to streamline the agricultural and rural development policy of the Western Balkan countries. The project will help share experiences of policy makers in SEE Ministries of Agriculture and academics by establishing an active cooperation at national and regional level, as well as providing decision support and recommendations for policy making. This will eventually lead to improved and streamlined policy formulation for better planning of budgetary support to the sector.

\*References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

## Matching FAO's expertise to Croatia's development priorities

FAO assistance in Croatia is currently being prioritized according to the Regional Initiatives for Europe and Central Asia:

- **Empowering smallholders and family farms** – The overall goal is to address the key problems of rural people by empowering smallholders and family farms to improve their livelihoods. Elimination of rural poverty, improving the resilience of rural populations (with a focus on smallholders) and inclusive growth for rural economies based on sustainable use of natural resources are the basic principles of the Initiative.
- **Agrifood trade and Regional Integration** – The overall goal is to increase regional and national capacities to deal effectively with the challenges posed by greater trade integration. It does this by developing better evidence on trade implications, improving the capacity of countries to use this evidence, facilitating neutral fora and dialogues on trade agreements, and supporting the design and implementation of appropriate policies at country level.

On 1 July 2013, Croatia became the 28th member of the European Union (EU) after a decade of carrying out the reforms needed to bring it into line with EU laws and standards. The country is playing a key role in extending FAO activities in the Balkans and transferring EU knowledge to other countries in the region. In particular, Croatia can provide qualified expertise to assist other applicant countries (Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia) on the "EU approximation process" in agriculture, adapting their agricultural laws and regulations to the EU Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI) standards.

Croatia is also a member of the European Commission for the Control of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). FAO recognizes that to better protect Europe, tackling the disease in endemic settings is crucial. The FAO/World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) FMD Control Strategy advocates for the strengthening of veterinary services, the value of regional networks across the globe, and a risk management approach.

FAO and Croatia collaborate on forest-related issues and activities in the European region and worldwide, particularly in promoting sustainable forest management. FAO's new Strategic Framework encompasses sustainable forest management and forestry in a cross-cutting manner with the view to achieve the highest contribution to eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, and other strategic objectives of the Organization.

Since 1996, FAO has been providing agricultural and rural project formulation assistance to the Government of Croatia. Nine projects formulated with FAO input have been approved for investments totalling US\$396.65 million by the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Areas of assistance have included agricultural acquis cohesion, agricultural pollution control, eco-system conservation, environmentally sound management of water and land resources, public rural development and property administration.

