



STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF SMALLHOLDERS IN BERRY PRODUCTION

April 2022

SDGs:





Country: Republic of Moldova

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Implementing Partners

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI) and the National Agency for Rural Development (ACSA).

Beneficiaries

Smallholder and family farmers, the rural extension service, and professional government staff.

Country Programming Framework (CPF) Outputs

Outcome 2 – Fostering sustainable agriculture and rural development.

Output 2.3 – New production technologies and guidelines for berries production available for small holder farmers.



BACKGROUND

There is room for growth in the berry sector in the Republic of Moldova. The sector has remained hindered by several factors, including a lack of varieties that are resistant to climate and transport hazards, insufficient post-harvest practices, a deficiency in marketing standards to support exports, and a limited knowledge among farmers in the application of economic, technological and management principles to strawberry and berry production.

This project was therefore designed to provide technical assistance in the identification of suitable regions for strawberry and berry production and in the establishment of demonstration fields that could be used for training activities. The technical training was envisioned to strengthen the capacity of smallholder farmers on berry production, as well as to develop the capacity of extension service providers so that they could serve as a resource for supporting farmers in the long term.

After an initial phase that was implemented between December 2017 and December 2019, a Phase II was carried out between June 2020 and December 2021 to allow for several remaining activities to be conducted.

IMPACT

The project aimed to support the sustainable development of agriculture in the Republic of Moldova by improving strawberry and berry production through the introduction of modern methodologies and technologies.

ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

The project Outcome, which aimed to strengthen national technical capacities for utilizing innovative technology in strawberry and berry production, was achieved, as were all four of the project Outputs.

Following the signing of a letter of agreement (LOA), the National Agency for Rural Development (ACSA) selected ten consultants from the Rural Extension Service (SER) to receive training as facilitators for the founding and management of Farmer Field Schools (FFSs). Several training of master trainers (TMT) sessions were conducted. The initial TMT sessions developed the capacity of FFS host specialists by covering a broad range of relevant topics. Two curricula were developed by FAO and the ACSA for practical and participatory training of the FFS facilitators, which was delivered through a series of presentations and documents. Ten FFSs were established across the country, where training was delivered on key elements of berry production and management.

The project successfully demonstrated and tested modern technologies for the production of strawberries and other berries, as well as their associated planting materials. The project team, together with the ACSA, identified and provided specifications for seven improved berry varieties to be imported from Italy for use at pilot demonstration sites. Similarly, the specification of agricultural materials and supplies that needed to be procured for the establishment of the demonstration sites, as well as the selection of farmers to host demonstration plots, was carried out in a collaborative manner by the project team and the ACSA.

Five pilot demonstration sites were established. Awareness-raising activities to support public confidence in sustainable strawberry and berry production were also completed during the inception workshop, as well as at training sessions, FFSs and farmer field days. In particular, field days at three different pilot demonstration plots were held to reach a broader audience, drawing attention to the multiple facets of success concerning new technology introduced by the project. This included the introduction of innovative methodologies for fruit production and the propagation of planting materials, as well as for testing soil and water conditions.

Additional training on the multiplication and maintenance of planting materials was delivered at farmer field days. The first series of practical field days covered production technologies and the propagation of planting materials, while the second series addressed integrated pest management (IPM) or macro/microelement fertilization. Finally, several draft technical guidelines and manuals were developed, covering the production of strawberry, blackberry, raspberry and redcurrant in the country; planting materials for strawberry and berries; and IPM. Finally, a draft manual on good practices in post-harvest processing, which considers European Union (EU) regulations and market requirements in terms of hygiene, packaging and berry traceability, was also prepared by an international consultant.

IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

During its initial phase of implementation, delays led to a lack of achievement of several of the project activities. A second phase to complete these activities was requested and granted. Despite further delays caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic under Phase II, the majority of planned activities were implemented successfully, with a few being carried out virtually in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions. Activity 1.5, which envisaged the implementation of national conferences/workshops on good agricultural practices (GAPs) could not be held because of the restrictions. Under Activity 1.6, a final workshop was to be organized; however, it also could not be held because of the pandemic restrictions. That being said, the major results of the project were discussed at meetings and informational materials were distributed.

All activities were implemented within the allocated budget.

The risks to implementation were managed successfully by the project team, whose flexible approach allowed for adaptation.

FOLLOW-UP FOR GOVERNMENT ATTENTION

The project identified key technical gaps and capacity-development needs under each Output. Further support should be provided to berry farmers, especially in marketing, processing and value addition to increase productivity.



SUSTAINABILITY

1. Capacity development

The Government and the ACSA are committed to supporting the demonstration sites for strawberry and berry production using innovative technologies that were established under the project. Additionally, ongoing training efforts are expected to make use of the training manuals and extension materials developed. The commitment to maintaining project outcomes is firmly embedded in national policies on phytosanitary requirements for importing new plant genetic materials both for research purposes and for fostering the introduction of improved crop varieties. These efforts were made possible by strengthened relationships between government ministries, the ACSA, the Berry Farmers Association and farming communities, who are committed to the sustainability of the project Outputs.

2. Gender equality

Both men and women participated in project design and inception. Field and training activities equitably benefited women and men involved in the production, marketing and processing of berries, and they are expected to continue to benefit equitably along the strawberry and berry production and distribution chain, as well as through the availability of fruits for consumption.

3. Environmental sustainability

The project focused on improving the management of resources to support sustainable agriculture through an integrated crop management approach that utilized improved varieties, and addressed soil nutrient and water management, IPM, proper post-harvest handling and environmentally friendly storage.

4. Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) – in particular Right to Food and Decent Work

Although the strawberry and berry sector is still in its infancy, the project supported its development, which will ultimately foster a higher degree of food security and generate employment opportunities along the value chain. These outcomes were supported by the project's top-down and bottom-up participatory approach, which took all stakeholders into consideration in project development and implementation ensured and accountability and transparency in the development of policies and strategies for natural resource management to address climate change. This will ensure an effective response to the needs and full range of rights for all parties involved.

5. Technological sustainability

The improved methodologies for agricultural production and management met the requirements of farmers, particularly those looking to expand into strawberry and berry production. All of the technologies and information introduced, and management practices demonstrated are accessible to and replicable by farmers nationwide. Importantly, the establishment of FFSs with trained personnel allows for the continued strengthening of farmers' capacities using locally available expertise beyond the project.

The project established five pilot demonstration sites. The development of a technical manual and guidelines and training materials is expected to have a long-term impact on introducing project interventions and skills to other districts and farming communities.

The selected stakeholders and targeted beneficiaries were provided with extensive support. They have the potential to adopt improved technologies and practices to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project results without further support.

6. Economic sustainability

The establishment of a nursery for planting materials will continue to support the availability of agricultural resources beyond the project.

At the time of reporting, no additional funds had been allocated; however, the project highlighted the need to mobilize resources to scale up the interventions nationwide, and to support marketing, processing and further research and development of climate-smart agriculture technologies and practices for berry fruits.



DOCUMENTS AND OUTREACH PRODUCTS

- ☐ ACSA. Training of master trainers materials. 34 pp.
- □ ACSA. 2019. Farmer field school curricula. Chisinau. 12 pp.
- □ ACSA. 2019. Methodology for data collection in the field training material. Chisinau. 8 pp.
- □ ACSA. 2019. Soil analysis kits training material. Chisinau. 3 pp.
- ☐ FAO and the ACSA. 2019. Draft Guide on the Production of Strawberry and Berries Planting Materials. Chisinau. 44 pp.
- **FAO.** 2019. Draft Technical Manual on Postharvest Handling, Storage and Processing of Berry Fruits in Moldova. Chisinau. 46 pp.
- **FAO.** 2021. Republic of Moldova Supply Chain and Market Analysis. Chisinau. 57 pp.
- ☐ **FAO.** 2021. Technical Manual for the Production of Strawberries, Blackberries, Raspberries and Currants in the Republic of Moldova. Chisinau. 72 pp.





ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS - LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Berry production strengthened through the introduction of new approaches and instruments for its sustainable development				
			rough	
Indicator	 Farmers' capacity developed in berry production using innovative technologies and new varieties, increasing sources of greater income, especially in rural areas. Specialists received training on the concepts and practices of innovative berry production technologies. 			
Baseline	 No FFSs on berry production exist. Limited knowledge of few experts from NGOs. Limited production of berries and planting materials using innovative technologies, and very low compatibility with no capacity to meet the natural and climatic conditions of the area 			
End Target	 Ten FFSs are established in three different regions of the country At least 30 persons representing the Ministry, research institutes, NGOs and farmer organizations are trained at the national level. Establishment of two demonstration sites (1 ha in total) for production of berries using most suitable varieties and establishment of nursery (0.5 ha) for production of planting materials for farmers' use. 			
Comments and follow-up action to be taken	Under the second phase of the project, all of the objectives were achieved. Activities on developing national and smallholder farmer capacities for strawberry and berry production and			
Strengthened of production	capacity of the country for promotion	n of innovative technologies on planting material a	and berry	
Indicators		Target	Achieved	
Farmers' capacity developed in berry production using innovative technologies and new varieties, increasing sources for greater income, especially in rural areas.		Ten FFSs are established in three different regions of the country.	Yes	
No FFSs on bei	ry production exist.			
The planned activities under this Output were completed, with the exception of Activity 1.5. Activity 1.6 was				
Organize an inception workshop (WS1) under the auspices of the MARDE to discuss with a wide range of stakeholders the project objectives, identify needs and priorities of berry production sector in view of improving national capacity building programs and review the project work plan				
A joint inception workshop was conducted for this project and TCP/MOL/3607 (Support to Capacity Building on Agriculture and Rural Development Policy and Implementation of Local Community Development Pilot Projects) on 25 January 2018. This was followed by a project planning workshop held on 28 March 2019, attended by 38 participants. The workshop was facilitated by the LTO, the ACSA, and an International Horticulture Specialist, and a report was produced. Several delays were experienced in project implementation beyond the workshop, including the development and finalization of the LOA with the service provider, the ACSA, and the recruitment of project staff and international consultants.				
smallholders s		or berry production with purpose of provision to pplies and delivery services, farm power, equipmented farmers	ent),	
	sustainable de Smallholder fathe establishm Indicator Baseline End Target Comments and follow-up action to be taken Strengthened oproduction Indicators Farmers' capacusing innovative increasing sour in rural areas. No FFSs on ber The planned acpartially comple Organize an instakeholders the improving nation Achieved	Smallholder farmer and extension services' technic the establishment of demonstration sites and capace - Farmers' capacity developed in varieties, increasing sources of Specialists received training on technologies Demonstration sites for product the expectation of the service of the expectation of the	Smallholder farmer and extension services' technical capacities are improved for berry production the establishment of demonstration sites and capacity building - Farmers' capacity developed in berry production using innovative technologies a varieties, increasing sources of greater income, especially in rural areas. - Specialists received training on the concepts and practices of innovative berry production gies. - Demonstration sites for production exist. - Limited knowledge of few experts from NGOs Limited production of berries and planting materials using innovative technologic low compatibility with no capacity to meet the natural and climatic conditions of compatibility with no capacity to meet the natural and climatic conditions of compatibility with no capacity to meet the natural and climatic conditions of compatibility with no capacity to meet the natural and climatic conditions of compatibility with no capacity to meet the natural and climatic conditions of compatibility with no capacity to meet the natural and climatic conditions of compatibility with no capacity to meet the natural and climatic conditions of compatibility with no capacity to meet the natural and climatic conditions of compatibility with no capacity of the country - At least 30 persons representing the Ministry, research institutes, NGOs and farm organizations are trained at the national level. - Establishment of two demonstration sites (1 ha in total) for production of berries suitable varieties and establishment of nursery (0.5 ha) for production of berries and follow-up action to be taken - Under the second phase of the project, all of the objectives were achieved. Activities developing national and smallholder farmer capacities for strawberry and berry production promoting the use of innovative agricultural methodologies were carried out. Five demonstration plots were established for the cultivation of strawberries, raspberries blackberries and redcurrant. - Strengthened capacity of the country for promotion of innova	

	At least five formal trainings of master trainers (TMTs) on the concepts and practices of innovative planting material and berry production technologies				
Activity 1.3	Achieved Comments	Twenty-six participants attended TMT sessions on 23–24 May 2019, facilitating the development of FFS host specialists with knowledge on (i) the concept, elements and specializations of FFSs; (ii) the implementation of FFS curricula and topics for resultative and methodical demonstrations; (iii) the particularities necessary for the growth and fructification of strawberry and berries; (iv) the requirements for soil and irrigation for berry crops; and (v) the application of fertilizer for berries and the diagnosis of soil and water. The TMT session on soil testing and analysis was held on 23 October 2019, while the session covering IPM on strawberry and berry			
	plantations was held on 13 December 2019. Organize at least two trainings of master trainers (TMTs) for national professional staff and extension service				
		ner associations and NGOs on FFS methodology and facil		3CI VICC	
Activity 1.4	Achieved	Yes	J		
	Comments	Two TMT sessions on improved berry production and management practices were conducted on 27–28 June 2019 and 8–9 August 2019. The trainings focused on the multiplication of strawberry planting materials and berry crops, the application of mulches with non-woven fabrics (both agryl and lutrasil), packaging and the technological requirements for the use of packaging; the appreciation of phytosanitary status and IPM on fruit plantations, and the propagation of strawberry and berry crops.			
	experience of	ast two national berry conferences/workshops on good a other countries and raise awareness on modern technology.		<i>!</i>	
Activity 1.5	Achieved	No			
	Comments		ctivity was proposed for consideration during the second phase of project implementation; ver, the conferences could not be organized due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its related ctions.		
	Organize a fin	The state of the s			
Activity 1.6	Comments Owing to time constraints, as well as the delayed recruitment and missions carried out by the international consultant, there were also delays in the completion of the technical peer review and in the editing and publication of the technical manual and extension materials. The activity was proposed for completion during the second phase of project implementation; however, it could not be carried out because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The major results of the project were discussed at meetings organized with the main beneficiaries and stakeholders of the project. Informational materials on the achievements of the project were disseminated among the targeted groups of berry producers.				
	Innovative technologies on planting materials and berry production demonstrated and tested				
Output 2	Indicators	Target		Achieved	
	for trainings a	nd FFSs. trainings conduct	tion sites established and ed.	Yes	
Baseline	No demonstra		. d		
Comments	The envisioned Output was achieved through the completion of planned activities. In fact, the target was exceeded, as five demonstration plots were established in the villages of Meleseni, Mana, Hristoforovca, Negureni and Dobruja Veche. These consist of strawberry plots (400 square metres on average), a raspberry plot (1 500 square metres), a blackberry plot (6 000 square metres) and a redcurrant plot (2 000 square metres). Additional efforts that raised awareness about the project were completed during the second phase of implementation through the organized events and dissemination of technical materials.				
	Identify in a participatory manner together with country's research and extension systems suitable type of berries, varieties and cultivars, prepare technical specifications for the tender and procurement of the planting materials of the identified species				
Activity 2.1	Achieved	Yes			
Activity 2.1	Comments	The project team, in collaboration with the ACSA, idenfor the import of improved berry varieties from Italy. T (Albion, Selva, Annabelle and Elba), one raspberry variety (Lockness) and one redcurrant variety (Jonker) for pilot	hese included four strawberry very (ty (Tulane), one blackberry van	varieties	

Activity 2.2	Identify the list of tools, equipment and machinery needed for establishment and development of demonstration sites and develop the technical specifications for tender and procurement of the needed equipment		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The project team, in collaboration with the ACSA, identified and provided detailed specifications for the procurement of agricultural supplies and materials required for the establishment of pilot demonstration sites, in addition to the import of berry varieties from Italy. Delays were experienced in the procurement of greenhouses and facilities from overseas suppliers, which delayed the establishment of pilot demonstration sites.	
	Select suitable	e regions and implementing partners for establishment and maintenance of at least three	
		n sites to be used for trainings and farmer field schools	
Activity 2.3	Achieved	Yes	
7.22.20, 2.2	Comments	The project team and the ACSA selected five farmers to host pilot demonstration plots using the criteria that had previously been agreed upon.	
	analysis of the deficiencies or	and maintenance of at least three demonstration sites (0.5 ha each) including land preparation, soil for pests and pathogens, using soil amendments (if testing indicates nutrient toxicity, other problems), installing drip irrigation system and anti-hail nets, planting the plantlets, modern production technologies throughout the growing season	
	Achieved	Yes	
Activity 2.4	Comments	Five pilot demonstration plots were established: (i) Farm Holding (FH) Portnoi Anatolie (strawberry in greenhouses) in Meleseni (village), Calarasi (rayon); (ii) FH Tarus Segiu (strawberry in open fields) in Mana (village), Orhei (rayon); (iii) FH Vizitiu Petru (strawberry in open fields and greenhouses) in Hristoforovca (village), Ungheni (rayon); (iv) FH Malai Valeriu (authorized nurseries, strawberry in open fields and greenhouses, and raspberry, blackberry and redcurrant in open fields) in Negureni (village), Telenesti (rayon); and (v) FH Urojai Berezov (strawberry, raspberry, blackberry and redcurrant in open fields) in Dobruja Veche (village), Singerei (rayon).	
	Organize publ	ic awareness campaign, including arrangement of video interviews, collecting information,	
	preparing the	briefs and success story that will help ensuring public confidence in sustainable agriculture and ion, specifically	
	Achieved	Yes	
Activity 2.5	Comments	Awareness-raising activities were completed during the project inception workshop and training sessions, as well as at FFSs and during field days. The awareness-raising campaign included the organization of three field days at the demonstration plots, three TV advertisements, three videos on the agribusiness portal, five articles in the national media, twelve radio reports and social media posts.	
		days at least two times during the vegetation for a broader audience to demonstrate echnologies of the berries production	
	Achieved	Yes	
Activity 2.6	Comments	Three field days were completed at three different pilot demonstration plots. At Demo Plot 3, the focus was on modern technologies for fruit production and the propagation of planting materials for strawberry (19 August 2019). At Demo Plot 2, emphasis was placed on modern technologies for fruit production and the propagation of planting material for strawberry, raspberry and blackberry (25 September 2019). At Demo Plot 5, the focus was on testing the conditions and quality of soil and water, as well as key elements in the implementation of modern technologies for the cultivation and propagation of planting materials for berries (25 October 2019).	

Output 3	Capacity of smallholders developed on the use of innovative technologies for planting materials and berry production					
	Indicators		Target	Achieved		
		ıles are developed.	Three training modules develope	ed. Yes		
Baseline	No training m					
Comments		d activities under this Output	•			
Activity 3.1			erials for FFS on application of innovative be as well as multiplication and the maintena			
	Achieved	Yes				
	Comments	In collaboration with the ACSA, the FAO international consultants developed two curricula for the implementation of FFS training. The curricula were used to conduct practical, participatory training sessions for FFS facilitators regarding the application of technological elements to processes involved in the production of seedling materials and berries. Twenty PowerPoint and Word presentations with information on cultivation technologies and the production of planting materials for strawberry and berry crops were used.				
	Identify the pa		facilitators in each region and organize at l	least one national		
	awareness rai	sing workshop on FFS for sma	allholders			
Activity 3.2	Achieved	Yes				
	Comments	pilot demonstrations, as w	with the Berry Farmers Association, identivell as the farmer communities to be involved	ed in the FFS trainings.		
			ield schools in different locations and organ	nize at least ten trainings		
			erry production for participating farmers			
	Achieved	Yes Ton EESs wore established	and apprationalized in different locations	with training hoing		
Activity 3.3	Comments	Ten FFSs were established and operationalized in different locations with training being delivered on major aspects of berry production and management. The name (and location) of the ten FFSs are Zaim (Causeni), Speia (Anenii Noi), Meleseni (Calarasi), Negureni (Telenesti), Hristoforovca (Ungheni), Mana (Orhei), Dobruja Veche (Singerei), Plopi (Donduseni), Pocrovca (Donduseni) and Colicăuti (Briceni).				
	Organize at least two training sessions on the multiplication and the maintenance of the planting materials					
	Achieved	Yes	·			
Activity 3.4	Comments	The first ten practical field and the propagation of pla	complished during farmer field days and exp days were conducted in July 2019, covering anting materials for strawberry and berry cr in August 2019, covering IPM or macroeler	ng production technologies rops. The second series of		
	Developing manuals and/or guidelines on innovative berry production technologies and plant protection methods, as well as multiplication and the maintenance of the planting materials for several types of berries					
	Achieved	Yes		· · · · ·// · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		
Activity 3.5	Comments	some draft technical manu were not finalized due to to the The Technical Manual for Moldova (56 pages). The Guide on Productic November 2019 (44 pages). Production leaflets for The IPM Guide for Berr Under Phase II, the Technic Production in the Republic Technical Manual for Production.	strawberry, raspberry, blackberry, and curr	ew at project closure. These s, Raspberries and Currants erials by FAO and the ACSA, rants. pberries and Currant e was changed from The perries and Currants in		
	Translation n	berry producers.	nong farmers, farmer associations, extensio	on service providers and		
	Ministry of Ag berry product	riculture, Regional Developm	nent and Environment, manuals and/or guid rotection methods as well as multiplication	delines on innovative		
Activity 3.6	Achieved	Yes				
	Comments	translated into local langu	cal guidelines and manuals produced under ages and disseminated to berry farmers, pr is and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food	roducer associations,		

	Strengthened market linkages between value chain actors and enhanced capacities of berry producers, traders and processors to meet the market's needs			
	Indicators		Target	Achieved
Output 4	post-harve — Berry fruit conducted — Berry value	e chain analysis and marketing	 A technical manual on postharvest handling, storage and processing developed. One forum meeting held. Market study and value chain report 	Yes
Baseline	developed 0	•	completed.	
Comments	Under Phase II, technical guidelines on supply chain and market analysis of berry production were developed and disseminated to berry producers, processors, and farmers' associations. Webinars on post-harvest practices, value chain analysis and market access were successfully conducted.			
			resent the result of FAO berry value chain analysis	
A - 12 - 21 - 4 - 4	Achieved	Yes	,	
Activity 4.1	Comments	Under Phase II, the results of the boorganized under Activity 4.5.	erry value chain analysis were presented during th	e webinar
	Design and pr markets	opose a model for berry value chain fo	or internal and provide recommendations for exte	rnal
Activity 4.2	Achieved	Yes		
,	Comments	included an analysis of berry expor	reloped for supply chain and market analysis. The r t market opportunities for the Republic of Moldov te berry supply chain and export promotion.	
	Prepare a mai		oost-harvest and processing taking into account EU	
			hygiene, packaging and traceability of produced b	perries
Activity 4.3	Achieved Comments		oldova Supply Chain and Market Analysis (57 pages) was
	developed. The publication was translated into Romanian. Conduct at least two training sessions on post-harvest processing and value addition			
	Achieved	Yes		
Activity 4.4	Comments	Under Phase II, a webinar on berry fruit harvesting and post-harvest care was conducted on 17 November 2020 for berry producers, berry producers' associations and representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry. The information presented at the webinar covered all aspects of optimal berry crop harvesting and post-harvest care practices so that growers and marketers will be able to reduce post-harvest fruit loss and provide destination markets with consistent supplies of high-quality berries.		
	Conduct at lea	ast one training session on market acc	ess	
	Achieved	Yes		
Activity 4.5	Comments	Under Phase II, a webinar on marketing and value chain analyses for berries was organized on 1 December 2020 with the participation of the most important actors along the berry value chain in Republic of Moldova. The webinar increased the level of knowledge of the participants on the domestic berry market, the global berry market, export market channels, berry fruit export market requirements, packaging materials, fruit quality requirements, grade standards, certifications, GlobalG.A.P., GlobalG.A.P. Risk Assessment on Social Practice (GRASP), and food safety.		value articipants y fruit tandards,
	Organize a stu	,	n berry processing) to one European Union membe	er country
	Achieved	Yes		
Activity 4.6	Comments	Under Phase II, a study tour to Italy was conducted with two selected Moldovan berry farmers and one officer from the Ministry of Agriculture from 16 to 20 September 2019. The team visited (i) a technology research centre: (ii) a company engaged in the propagation and sale of berry		