

Farmer School for Sustainable Agriculture – Private Sector Promotion

Final Narrative Project Report January 2011 - December 2013

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Name of project	Farmer School for Sustainable Agriculture – Private Sector Promotion
Location of project	Northern part of Moldova- Drochia, Singerei, Riscani, Falesti and Glodeni districts
Implementing Agency	"Pro Cooperare Regionala" NGO – (ProCoRe)
Duration of project	January 2011 -December 2013
Period of reporting	January 2011 – December 2013

Objectives of the Project:

To improve living conditions in rural areas by supporting the development of private farming in a sustainable way.

Specific objectives:

O1 – Knowledge and skills development of private farmers in sustainable agriculture by establishing a "Farmer school" for adults and providing licensed courses / curricula.
O2 – Development of sustainable farming system. Supporting small and medium farmers through advisory services, thematic courses and farmer to farmer exchange.

Target Group:

Rural entrepreneurs, small and medium farmers from the rural area of North Moldova.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2011-2013 period the "Farmer School for Sustainable Agriculture" project has supported and developed small and medium farmers by providing them consultancy and training courses. During this period "ProCoRe" have trained a number of 1097 of individuals through such activities as: one day trainings, vocational trainings, study visits in Moldova and Romania, internships on local farms and practical session at Research Institute of Field Crops "Selectia". Also, 25 demonstrational plots have been created.

At the same time "ProCoRe" established good partnership relation with Balti State University "A. Russo", Research Institute of Field Crops "Selectia", Professional School from Ricani and FAER foundation from Romania in order to assure a successful implementation of the project activities. We didn't limit ourselves on that, also we collaborated with different local NGOs and economical agents of agricultural profile.

During 2011 – 2013 the project have been occurred 5 groups of vocational trainings (theoretical and practical internship) with 119 participants.

50 "one day trainings" was performed in different localities/towns. 243 farmers benefited from 13 study tours in Moldova and Romania. Also, 25 demonstrational plots were created in collaboration with "Selectia". The activities were very beneficial to the farmers because they have learned about new technologies and new ways of sustainable agriculture. Due to the offered vocational sessions and one day trainings farmers were able to take necessary steps in order to prevent harvest loss from drought and other natural calamities. Also they have been taught how to protect their harvest from external factors. The young farmers that benefited from the course learned to become a successful farmer, and about the agricultural secrets that they are not taught in the school. Practical sessions helped them to better assimilate the theoretical information and apply it into

actual work. Study visits contributed to the development of farmers because they were capable to pursue the theory in work, and to exchange advices from each other.

Results: Progress of activities and results

During the reporting period the following results have been achieved:

1) Vocational training for private farmers

As regards to vocational training organized within the project, changes have occurred on Moldovan Educational System level. Since 2011 it is not necessary to obtain a license in order to run a "farmer school" by an NGO. It is enough to have a course curricula approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Education, space (classrooms) and a group of experts for teaching. All this conditions together with other documents (registration certificate, bank account, etc.) allow to an NGO to get "accreditation" and to provide vocational training for farmers. This was fulfilled by ProCoRe in 2011 (when the farmer School starts). The vocational training for young farmers consisted of approved vocational courses (curricula) for two specialties: (i) specialist in cattle breeding and (ii) specialist in vegetable production. Training courses with duration of 280 hours per course: 90 hours of theory and 190 hours of practical sessions have been approved by the Ministry of Education.

Since the vocational training were divided in 3 main parts: theoretical session; Practical sessions – Research Institute of Field Crops "Selectia"; Balti municipality and practical session on farm – internships, there have been achieved a number of results within 2011-2013. During 3 years of implementation 119 farmers successfully finished all the steps of the vocational training that was held with the help of the local stakeholders "A. Russo" state university from Balti, professional school from Riscani, Research Institute of Field Crops "Selectia" and also some partner farms from the region. (*Consult annex 1 "List of activities within "Farmer School" from January 2011 –December 2013"*)

Within this activities there have been observed an increase in professionalism of the private farmers and also an increased interest of beneficiaries on eco-production. Due to vocational training, practical sessions at Selectia Field Crop Institute and internships at local farms, farmers extended their knowledge in what concerns technology, farm administration and sales. A very important fact is that the beneficiaries were from different communities, and that also created a natural experience exchange between them. This fact contributed to the creation of partnership relations between them on a cluster level (vegetable/cattle growers from some villages). The internships at local farms are a great source of learning by doing, as trainees see that with a correct technology and techniques one can make profit in agriculture. Some of the farmers, admitted that as a result of the trainings and presentations given by the lecturers, they started to use the computer, which contributed not only to their personal development, but also relieved the accounting and informational process in their farms. Because of the marketing tips offered by the trainers, some of the farmers could increase their sales and resulting in a higher income, especially those who grow vegetables in green houses and took the advantage of selling directly from their field plot.

The following outcomes were achieved as a result of "Farmer School" activities during 2011-2013:

- **Established partnership between ProCoRe and local stakeholders (Balti State University, Research Institute of Field Crops "Selectia", professional schools and colleges) for promoting an alternative farming system based on sustainable development.**
- **Visibility of ProCoRe/HEKS activities on the local level of public institutions (Rayon Council, Agricultural Agencies) as well as at central level (Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, Ministry of Education).**
- **Availability of good quality vocational training and consultancy services for private farmers.**
- **Enhanced capacity of the local farmers to apply principles of sustainable agriculture in their farms.**
- **Increased professionalism of the private farmers as a result of continuous training.**
- **Increased interest of beneficiaries on eco-production.**

2) Thematic courses: Daily based training sessions

A. One day trainings on technical topics

For those farmers who were unable to attend long term courses one day trainings on various technical subjects, according to their needs have been organized. A total number of 1097 beneficiaries attended 50 activities that were organized during 3 years of implementation of Farmer School. (*Consult annex 1 "List of activities within "Farmer School" from January 2011 –December 2013"*). The trainings/workshops were interactive so that farmers have made information/experience exchange and had the opportunity to learn from each other. Besides basic topics, also there have been discussed problems and concrete situations on which the lecturer has come up with solutions. These seminars have strengthened farmer's knowledge and capacities, and are contributing to the improvement of the system production in agriculture sector. One day trainings are a great opportunity for farmers when they need quick answers to problems that appear spontaneous. Another reason why one day trainings are convenient to the farmers is because they are organized in their villages and therefore more farmers have the possibility to attend, including women due to proximity and time saving.

It is noticed that women continue to be involved in training and they represent 30% of auditorium. (*Consult annex 2&3 "Gender Representation within Farmer School Activities"& "Diagram Gender Representation within 'Farmer School' activities from 2011 to 2013"*). More and more they are interested in developing their farms using modern technologies.

B. Demonstration plots

In order to demonstrate the benefits of sustainable farming system ProCoRe / HEKS in collaboration with Research Institute of Field Crops "Selectia" and the Swiss College of Agriculture Zollikofen offers/provides consulting / technical assistance for creating demonstration plots. During the reporting period there have been created 39 demonstrational plots of under sown crops and local and international consultants (Boris Boincean, Pasat Dorian, Andre Stucki) provided for them the necessary informational support. The concept of under sown crops is a relatively new concept in Moldova. The farmers are sometimes afraid to try this and they do not understand the true benefit of this concept. While taking in consideration this fact 6 dissemination activities were organised which is very important. Not only they bring the new concept to the farmers, but also explain its benefit and methods how to use it. Most farmers are focused on the level of harvest; this concept brings them a good level of harvest and also takes care of maintaining the soil fertility without using chemicals.

From 2011 various students from Swiss College of Agriculture Zollikofen are coming to Moldova to do some studies and also share the technologies used in Switzerland. A group of 17 students from Swiss College of Agriculture Zollikofen have visited some of the project beneficiaries in spring, 2011. In 2012 and 2013, 2 students (Andre Stucki and Rudolf Weber) made some studies on farm level (demonstration plots) and also organised some dissemination activities for our beneficiaries.

3) Farmer Field School for vegetable growers

Due to the fact that continuous improvement of basic professional knowledge of vegetable growers is very important for Moldovan farmers and still needed, at the end of 2012 a decision was taken to start with the Farmer Field School (FFS) in Northern Moldova run by ProCoRe in collaboration with local existing agricultural NGOs and/or local specialists in agriculture. The FFS as a new concept started in March 2013 and showed to be a good initiative from the very beginning as farmers showed their interest in it. In order to be able to create FFS, farms from several communities have been selected. For each farm there have been identified and selected a group of beneficiaries that studied/applied in practice different techniques on vegetable production throughout the project.

The activities were held with the help of a schedule which included different subjects according to the beneficiary needs and usual problems they encounter during the production cycle. Since the beginning of the FFS 20 activities have been organized. Farmer groups (up to 20 each) meet regularly during the vegetable season cycle under the guidance of a skilled specialist, this way we gained a total of 260 beneficiaries. (*Consult*

annex 1 "List of activities within "Farmer School" from January 2011 –December 2013"). Farmers contribute with up to 15% from total cost of FFS, ProCoRe contributes with 85%. 2 NGOs, a producers association from Drochia (AgroCons NGO) and Glodeni (Farm Prosper NGO) took the lead in FFS 2013.

Farmers and trainers appreciate the new concept (FFS) because in this way they do not just listen to regular theory, but have a chance to discuss and analyse current problems. Many times, farmers even bring a sample from their own field in order to ask the opinion of the experts and other participants. During these events farmers have been very enthusiastic and they have admitted that because of visiting different farms they can remark for themselves the best moments from each and after that implement them in their own farm.

Outcome:

- **Improved capacities for farmers in prioritizing field problems and finding appropriate solutions.**
- **Increased productivity and quality of the products of the FFS beneficiaries.**
- **Improved knowledge and practical skills in vegetable production.**

4) Study Visit MD

During the years in order to demonstrate the existing levels of modern/sustainable production achieved in other parts of Moldova which could be replicated in Drochia, Falesti, Riscani, Singerei and Glodeni, ProCoRe organised a series of 9 study tours on different topics, which covered a number of 186 beneficiaries. (Consult annex 1 "List of activities within "Farmer School" from January 2011 –December 2013"). Throughout the years farmers, beneficiaries of Pro Cooperare Regionala, had a chance to visit Moldovan successful farms cattle breeders as well as vegetable growers from North to South of Moldova. They have visited farms from villages/districts as: Anenii Noi; Ecoplantera SRL; Zabriceni, Edinet; Maximovca; Reditu de Sus; Falesti etc. Study visits present for farmers a very good experience, because the farmer exchange visit approach involves farmers who share a particular interest from one location visiting others elsewhere who have bigger experience in managing problems which arise at farms. This approach of technology dissemination: (i) helps to promote better farming by providing an opportunity for farmers to see and discuss the best techniques, (ii) creates a situation in which informal contacts and learning take place.

2) Study Visit RO

Study visits are so important for local farmers. Study visits abroad have an impact just as big, or maybe even bigger, since Moldova is a poor developed country, within this activity, we gave the chance to Moldovan farmers to observe, learn and implement in their farms modern technologies and methods used by farmers from better developed countries. Since 2011 a total of 57 farmers benefited of 4 study visits in Romania, which have been organized with support from international partners FAER Foundation, LAM Foundation and CASA DIO. (Consult annex 1 "List of activities within "Farmer School" from January 2011 –December 2013").

Moldovan farmers have visited mainly animal/milk farms, sheep and goat farms and a milk processing factory. They have learned about modern systems of shelters (stables) construction, milking technology and milk quality, nutrition and feed preparation. Also they had the possibility to learn about preparation and use of manure, the necessary equipment for a family type farm and the positive and negative aspects of different forms/structures of association/cooperation in their field.

Study Visits are a great opportunity for the farmers to prove their theoretical knowledge. They can see how different methods are implemented and the positive and negative impact of those. Also, due to study visits abroad farmers can compare the technology that they use with the methods from Moldova. Because Romania is in the EU they can find out about the European standards and compare them with Moldovan ones. Also, a big importance has the animal breed. Abroad as well as in the country our beneficiary can find out more about animal breeding, or know which type of breeds are more profitable (higher milk or meat production).