**Visegrad experience for small-scale family farms in Serbia**

Results of the small scale family farmer survey

CEEweb together with Young Researchers of Serbia, Eko-Centar, Juniperia, Daphne – Institute of Applied Ecology and Naturalists Club Poland have launched a project on experience sharing and capacity building in small-scale farming. The project “Empower the powerless: Visegrad experience for small-scale family farms in the Western Balkans” aims to place small family farms at the centre of food security, local economy and environmental protection in rural Serbia.

With the first event of our project on 3-4rd February, 2015 in Szeged we provided to more than 40 people from various sectors mostly from Serbia, but also from the Visegrad countries an overview of the opportunities that small-scale farmers have in the European Union. The Common Agriculture Policy and the specific legislation on organic farming, but also the financial support to environmentally friendly agricultural practices and rural development can provide valuable help to Serbian farmers during and after the EU accession, as well. Therefore, attention was devoted to the current and future EU agriculture policies with a special focus on the synergies of agriculture and nature conservation, where small-scale farmers have a large role to play. Within the frame of the conference, we also shed light on the economic viability of small-scale farmers from the Visegrad countries showing challenges and special tools for the participants. The practical side of the event was further supported with the visit to an organic farm in Ópusztaszer. The conference not only tried to give experience from the Visegrad countries but enabled and gave space to participants to work in this experience to their specific processes in the Serbian context; sections on networking and small group discussions therefore were integral parts of the event. These served the purposes to induce participants to evolve their thoughts on further steps and formed the basis of the projects’ following steps, the trainings in Serbia. Participants were also asked to fill out a questionnaire in order to have a better understanding of their perspective and tailor our training sessions according to their needs.

**Farmer profile**

More than 40% of the respondents grew fruits, most popular being strawberries, plums, apples and blackberries. A third were growing vegetables, including peppers, tomatoes and cucumbers, while a quarter were cultivating fieldcrops such as cereals, sugar beet, onions and soybeans. Only 10% of the respondents, however, produced using organic techniques and a similar number dealt with livestock rearing. Other activities participants were carrying out included production of planting material, beekeeping and honey production, farming in greenhouses and horticulture.
Only 15% of the farmers were engaged in food processing, the rest being either into agro-tourism, subsistence or semi-subsistence farming. A quarter of the participants were also engaged in rural tourism in addition to their farming activities.

![Main agricultural outputs as % of the total](image)

*Fig.1) Main agricultural outputs from respondents’ households as % of total. ‘Other’ includes hazelnuts, walnuts, honey and vineyards*

**Perspectives on small scale family farming**

Half of the respondents considered that small scale family farmers are currently neglected in Serbia and they do not benefit from sufficient support from the state. Likewise, there was a general feeling that small scale farmers are not competitive on the market and cannot thus be financially viable. Nevertheless, the importance and wide range of services small scale family farmers provide for the society was generally recognised. According to some, small scale farmers were essential to preserving traditions and to contributing to the development of the Serbian society. Moreover, their role was expected to grow in importance in the future, especially if one takes into account that they farm most of Serbia’s Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA).

In this perspective, participants saw the small scale family farming sector as central to the provision of ecosystem services and the enhancement of sustainable agriculture. Nevertheless, most farmers who were questioned about biodiversity, nature and the link between the two and nature protection did not feel confident enough with the little knowledge they had on the topic. Only a third of the respondents said they were aware of the link between agriculture and nature conservation, while a mere 15% replied they had knowledge on the benefits of sustainable agriculture, including organic farming.
Small scale family farmers and nature protection

Asked if they were informed on the topic of agri-environmental schemes from the European Union to farmers, an overwhelming majority of the respondents answered that they either had no knowledge of such programmes or had no experience whatsoever. Only 10% said they were aware and had some knowledge of such programmes. On the other hand, more than half of the participants had been involved in programmes targeting nature protection in agriculture or development programmes regarding the economic potential of agricultural households. This included eco camps, organic production projects, integrated agriculture, women empowerment programmes, development of rural tourism initiatives and efforts to reach legal quality standards. A quarter of the participants said they have not taken part in any such activity, while 15% confessed they were highly interested. Moreover, 85% of the respondents cooperated for nature protection at a local level, mostly through eco camps, involvement with local NGOs, educational events, sustainable food production or appropriate waste disposal. Likewise, almost all participants were engaged in a type of cooperation at the local level, in the form of clusters, associations, informal collaboration agreements or cooperatives.

In terms of training opportunities, participants showed great interest in a number of topics. First and foremost, they highlighted the central role of market access and the fact that it would be of great help to continue the exchange of good practices with the Visegrad countries. Production development, branding and labelling of products was another preference among small scale family farmers. EU mechanisms for the protection of nature and for the support of family agricultural households in the
framework of the Common Agriculture Policy also ranked high. Participants were interested in establishing cooperatives in order to foster more resource share and boost their market potential, but were also interested in learning more about EU and national requirements and opportunities for nature protection in agriculture. Competitiveness and performance in environmental protection were also issues brought into discussion.

![Preferences for further training](image)

- Market access
- Exchange of good practices with Visegrad countries
- Production development
- Branding and labelling
- Knowledge of EU regulations and opportunities

**Fig. 3) Top five preferences for further training expressed by small scale family farmers in Serbia**

Particular demands for training were related to the preservation of local traditional crafts primarily related to the food production and its access to the market with under the new EU conditions. Also, participants were eager to learn more specific examples and experiences on regulation of natural habitats and reserves (such as pheasants and wild ducks) on family farms.

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