



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Projekat za konkurentnu privredu
Competitive Economy Project

The future looks brighter for blueberry producers in Serbia

“We showed that only through interest-based integration of small producers, working on their own farms, proved to be a sustainable way to support Serbian farmers to become competitive with EU producers, and that three basic elements of successful production - quantity, quality and continuity - are fulfilled. Through such projects, we are helping to raise awareness among local producers that only collectively they can survive, develop and become competitive in world market,” said Katarina Jelisavcic, Brestovik’s Project Manager and Global Gap Consultant.



Cultivation and production of blueberries has a relatively short history in Serbia. The first certified plants arrived about ten years ago in limited scale and capacity. As international market demand has grown over the last several years, so too has the interest to establish commercial production of Serbian blueberries. However, in Serbia, the path to large-scale cultivation of blueberries faces several obstacles.

One of the primary problems this promising sector faces is the lack of knowledge about fresh berry markets in the EU, a market that

is on the way to become one of the biggest in the world. Another issue is that Serbia has been a dominate player in the IQF (frozen) segments of the berry industry, with insufficient capacity to manage fresh berry logistics. Finally, since fresh berry production is a relatively new trend in Serbia, only selected blueberry producers with enough investment capital possess adequate knowledge, resources and experience to produce this woody perennial shrub. For most of the small-scale, traditional farmers in Serbia, who lack resources, achieving quality and uniformity in large blueberry cultivation is difficult. As such, integration with EU markets becomes difficult and Serbia’s current blueberry production is picked up by small international traders and intermediaries, who do most of the value addition and packaging outside of Serbia.

To tap into this market opportunity, forward-looking, innovative companies are stepping in to develop comprehensive cooperative systems to address these gaps. One such company is Cold Storages Brestovik. Established in 2017, the company realized that immediate integration with EU and world retail opportunities in the fresh segment, particularly blueberries, is the best long-term strategy for

USAID Competitive Economy Project
10L/VIII Bulevar Mihajla Pupina St.
11000 Belgrade, Republic of Serbia
Tel. +381 (0) 11 40 11 700
Email: info@konkurentno.rs



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Projekat za konkurentnu privredu
Competitive Economy Project

future growth, and that professional management and proactive, fair relationships with growers are a must in order to succeed in meeting this goal.

To this end, Brestovik established a modern distribution and purchasing center for processing and storing fruits and vegetables. With a production capacity of 1,400 tons and specialty-built sorting, grading and packaging facility to ensure proper handling of fruit and vegetables, the facility serves to supplement and handle its own production on 35 hectares of land under fruit cultivation, of which, 6 hectares are covered with 20,000 highbush blueberry seedlings.

Enter USAID - in coordination with USAID's Regional Economic Growth (REG) Project and USAID Competitive Economy Project (CSS), Brestovik was introduced to and secured an agreement with Greenyard Group, one of the EU's largest distributors of fruits and vegetables. By establishing trust-based links with a large, global distributor, Brestovik managed to secure a market for final, small-packet berry products tied to Greenyard's global retail network. Furthermore, by positioning itself as a



transparent and equitable production integrator, with a logistic capacity to aggregate quality produce at the local level, Brestovik opened the door for broader cooperation with a large, globally-oriented company. Partnership with Greenyard dictated introduction of new standards of management and production. In cooperation with CSS, 50 out of 150 producers working with Brestovik were trained to produce Global Gap certified blueberries. Brestovik engaged a Global Gap consultant to prepare select cooperants to receive the

designation, and participants received expert advice on planting, growing and harvesting blueberries, as well as financial assistance to implement Global Gap standards on their farms. This process involved first-hand education and direct technical assistance to producers throughout all stages of the production process, implementation and end-to-end logistics planning.

Next season, with the groundwork prepared within their network of certified cooperants and new agreements in place with Greenyard Group, Brestovik expects to increase export of certified blueberries up to 150 tons to Greenyard. Equally important, Brestovik plans to move on to other fruit cultures over the coming years, based on the same supply chain model established with blueberry cooperants. By aligning with a global company, and changing the way business is typically done, Brestovik is paving the way for large scale, high-value blueberry- and other fruit and vegetables- cultivation in Serbia – with secure, high-demand, high-value markets, where Serbia will finally receive recognition as a strong and reliable grower of fresh, healthy and delicious berry (and other) fruits.

USAID Competitive Economy Project
10L/VIII Bulevar Mihajla Pupina St.
11000 Belgrade, Republic of Serbia
Tel. +381 (0) 11 40 11 700
Email: info@konkurentno.rs