



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Projekat za konkurentnu privredu
Competitive Economy Project

Make space on your shelf for new delicious spreads from Serbia!

Healthy, tasty, quality and innovative products to reach the world market

“This step was so important, it changed my life! At the right moment, I took part in the Premium Food Design Hub initiative and got support to improve my product and make it premium”

The entrepreneurs and firms of the Serbian food industry are developing innovative, high-quality products for both domestic and export markets. The USAID Competitive Economy Project supports the industry to catalyze international recognition of premium Serbian products and promote the sector’s growth.

Nikola Stanišić, a young, bright, 25-year old owner of Stanišić Bio, whose father is a famous rakia producer, didn’t want to follow his father’s footsteps in the family brandy and spirits business. He aspired to do something different and on his own - to use the natural gifts of the land to create a delicious and healthy food product. Tapping into the booming health industry, Nikola set out to create a high-quality, vegan spread without gluten and sugar additives. After giving it some thought, he decided that local forest mushrooms would be the primary ingredient, due to their nutritional value and health benefits. Soon after, the *Forest’s Secret* brand was born, with a product line consisting of five different types of mushroom condiments and spreads: Porcini, Chanterelle, Horn of Plenty, Morel and Black Truffles.



As a young entrepreneur with a unique new product, Nikola started his business by selling products to health food stores, at open-air markets and local food festivals. Gradually, his products began to gain attraction, but with limited sales and high production costs, he was not sufficiently profitable. For a moment, he contemplated downgrading the product packaging to aluminum cans. This didn’t feel right, but he knew he had to make a tough business decision.

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It just so happened that at the time, the Premium Food Design Hub (PFDH) initiative was being launched by USAID's Competitive Economy Project. The initiative aims to support Serbia's food processing industry in developing new, premium products. Four food hubs were recognized as entrepreneurial "hot spots" with the capacity to provide diverse services to food start-ups. Main areas of support include food technology, product design, access to finance and promotional marketing tools to support up-and-coming food businesses.

Recognizing the opportunity, Nikola applied to participate in the incubator program, along with another 120 food businesses that also applied to upgrade their products and business operations. Stanišić Bio was one of the 20 companies selected to participate in the nine-month long incubator program.

"This step was so important, it changed my life! At the right moment, I took part in the Premium Food Design Hub initiative and got support to improve my product and make it premium," says Nikola. "Today, I realize what a big mistake it would have been if I went with the cheaper packaging for such a high-quality product."

Through the PFDH initiative, Nikola received technical support from the hub's food technologists and business team to further refine his product quality, improve his marketing and business plans, and re-brand the product line with new promotional marketing material. Re-designing the label and sticking with the modern, glass jar significantly helped to position the company's products as a premium brand in the marketplace.

Forest's Secret brand gained extensive visibility among consumers and landed on the shelf space of the biggest retail chains in Serbia. Today, Nikola's products can already be found in 60 *Mercator* shops (*Roda* and *Idea*) and 9 *Zlatiborac* stores across the country. Starting late September, it will be available in 88 *Drogerie Markt* (DM) and from January in 70 *Delhaize* stores operating in Serbia. He is not stopping there. To further penetrate the market, Nikola started taking advantage of his upgraded marketing and

business plan to kick-start online sales via targeted media adds to drive traffic to the company's website and social media accounts.

The Project also helped him establish contact with new foreign distributors and importers. He came to an agreement to export 60,000 jars of his product per year to a German buyer. The first pallet of 2500 jars will be shipped to a US-based distributor in next months.

Nikola is very excited about the rapid developments and new business opportunities opening. Through personal contacts and partnerships with the promising young producer *Happy Honey* (also a partner of the Project), Nikola will begin to export his product to the Canadian market. He's also secured

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arrangements with foreign distributors to place his products in other international markets – *La Fayette* in France, *Spar* in Switzerland and *DM* in Germany. Besides targeting these new markets, his plan is also to create smaller, premium packages targeting 4 and 5-star hotels, top local restaurants, and other HORECA establishments.

The USAID-funded Competitive Economy Project is a four-year, \$12 million initiative aimed at strengthening the competitiveness of Serbia's food processing industry, particularly fruit and vegetable value chains, with the goal of increasing sales and exports of Serbian food products in domestic and international markets.

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