



USAID HOSTS REGIONAL ONLINE CONFERENCE ON ICT IN AGRICULTURE

SKOPLJE, SARAJEVO, BELGRADE - On August 19, 2020, USAID's regional Economic Development, Governance and Enterprise Growth Project in cooperation with the USAID's Competitive Economy Project organized a regional online conference on the use of ICT innovations in agriculture. The event that gathered around 80 representatives of the companies and panelists from North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, discussed the importance and latest implementation of ICT innovations and applications in regional agriculture and their impact on future development.

While agricultural sector has been gradually responsive to application of modern digital and ICT technologies, several "market champions" from the region embraced the change in order to optimize production and to increase their regional and international competitiveness. This event showcased these examples from North Macedonia, Bosnia and Hercegovina and Serbia such as AgFutura technologies, Delta Agrar, Avital Agro and others. They presented the current level of digitalization in the primary production in Western Balkans countries, digitalization and integration of smallholder farms, systems for integration of different data and process, benefits of applying precision technologies in agriculture, etc.

Conference participants agreed that the countries of the southwestern Balkans have quality traditional fruit and vegetable producers, but their holdings are very fragmented, and the level of technology and digitization is often low. In such a situation, they have difficulties in access to the main fruit and vegetables distribution chains in Western markets. The ICT solutions that leading companies started to implement, lead to the consolidation of the sector and to integration of a larger number of smaller producers, also the use of modern software generates traceability and security of the food supply chain, which is required by foreign customers. One of the conclusions also is that the use of precision technologies in agriculture, enabled by modern machines, drones, and GIS / GPS technologies, is becoming more accessible on smaller farms, which optimizes production processes and leads to savings, environmental protection and greater competitiveness of producers.

The participants of the conference expect that it will serve as starting point for increased regional cooperation and business activities where service providers and recipients would meet and discuss potential cooperation.