

Armenia

Farmer-to-Farmer Program (FtF)



Active in Armenia since 1992, ACDI/VOCA was one of the first international organizations to implement post-Soviet development activities there. Through the Farmer-to-Farmer (FtF) program, ACDI/VOCA taught basic skills and new techniques to Armenian host organizations and farmers. FtF is a worldwide initiative that seeks to develop and increase the sustainability of private agricultural enterprises and support a variety of organizations, including rural finance organizations.

From 2003 to 2008, ACDI/VOCA fielded 104 highly skilled volunteer consultants in Armenia through FtF, reaching 99 new host organizations. ACDI/VOCA's volunteers shared their technical knowledge with hosts, private farmers, and entrepreneurs to better prepare them to succeed in Armenia's transitioning economic environment. Through this project, ACDI/VOCA reached 3,609 direct beneficiaries, of whom 1,189 were women, and 18,014 indirect beneficiaries. An additional 534 individuals received training through the program.

ACDI/VOCA fielded 104 highly skilled volunteer consultants through FtF.

The volunteer experts worked in a broad spectrum of small- and medium-scale agricultural enterprises involved in food production, processing, marketing and distribution. ACDI/VOCA and its consortium partners, Winrock International and Land O'Lakes, had a cooperative agreement with USAID to implement FtF in Armenia and across the Caucasus region through September 2008. FtF assignments typically lasted two to three weeks, and FtF volunteers have extensive knowledge and many years of practical experience in their technical area.

An example of ACDI/VOCA's commitment to local sustainability is its 1995 founding of the organization VISTAA, with support from USAID. VISTAA uses local Armenian agricultural and business specialists to assist emerging entrepreneurs by helping to identify and solve problems. In addition, VISTAA works closely with ACDI/VOCA and other organizations and agencies such as USDA, the U.N. World Food Program, UNDP and AED to strengthen Armenian agricultural enterprises and improve the environment of rural communities.

To develop sustainable private agribusinesses in Armenia, FtF focused on improving three areas: livestock and dairy production (including cheese



Project Profile

production and marketing, quality control, HASSP introduction, meat production, etc.), fruit and vegetable production (including greenhouse production and storage technologies, juice and preserves production, packaging and marketing, etc.) and agricultural support organization development.

Many of these projects were organized in collaboration with other organizations, such as the United Methodist Committee on Relief and USDA. The work was based in agribusiness and association development, the development and dissemination of best practices, increased sustainability of private agribusinesses, increased capacity of support organizations, strengthened rural finance systems, and small- and medium-scale enterprise development.

FtF Impact

The Elola Dairy Company, privatized in 2003, is a leading, high-quality cheese producer in Armenia. Although a cheese-consuming country, Armenia currently has a limited variety of cheese products offered by local producers. Traditionally, Armenian cheese-makers produce soft, salted cheeses, while European (hard) varieties are imported. With increasing demand for a wider variety of products and imports being expensive, Elola saw this as an opportunity for it as a local producer to develop new product types to meet demand at lower prices. In 2005, at the request of Elola, ACIDI/VOCA volunteer

expert Poul Hansen introduced Oltermanni cheese technology to the company and conducted a sample small-scale production for its employees. After the assignment, Elola initiated mass production of Oltermanni.

However, over time, it discovered some problems with the quality and shelf life of that particular cheese. In 2007 Elola asked ACIDI/VOCA to invite Hansen back to improve the Oltermanni



production technology and also to introduce Gouda and Edam cheese technology.

FtF volunteer Poul Hansen returned to conduct a 15-day assignment with Elola. Hansen identified the source of the problem the company was facing: gas formation within the film packaging after three weeks of storage. Hansen advised Elola to consult the packaging company for a more suitable film to prevent the problem in the future. Hansen also demonstrated small-scale production of Gouda cheese and Edam cheese (Holland cheese), which were two relatively new cheese varieties to Elola. Both the volunteer and the host were highly satisfied with the results of the assignment.

ACIDI/VOCA worked to develop agribusinesses and associations through Armenia-FtF.