

EUROPEAN UNION DELEGATION TEAM VISITS PROJECT SITES IN LERIK AND YARDIMLI DISTRICTS OF THE LANKARAN-ASTARA ECONOMIC REGION

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The Director of Lerik SADC welcomes the EU Delegation and other guests in Lahahiran, Lerik

A European Union Delegation (EUD) team was in the region, to inspect project sites and meet with project beneficiaries from May 6th to May 8th, 2024. The team members-Luica Di Troia, Head, Finance Section, Nigar Habibli, Finance Officer, and Ramila Aslanova, Programme Manager visited intensive apple demonstration orchards and potato demonstration plots in Lerik and Yardimli districts. They also met with participants of study visits organized to Germany and Türkiye.

The visit commenced with a productive meeting with the project team to gain insights into the activities of the “EU Support to Lankaran–Astara Economic Region of Azerbaijan” project. Tara Sharafudheen, Project Team Leader in her presentation highlighted the development challenges addressed, the value added by the project, and its current status. She shared findings from the value chain analysis of six fruit and vegetable crops in the region and the Composite Regional Development Index developed by the project.



*Meeting with potato producer group,
Lerik*



*Visiting strawberry greenhouse,
Jalilabad*



Meeting with potato producer group, Yardımlı

The first stop in the field was in Lerik district to observe the Intensive Apple Demonstration Orchards in Lalahiran and Divagac villages. These are part of the 2.5 hectares of demo orchards launched in the district. A total of 2010 apple saplings were provided to 7 farmers in six villages. The objective in partnership with the Scientific Research Institute for Fruit Growing, was to introduce, monitor and evaluate top commercial apple varieties to select cultivars best suited to propagation more widely in the district. The discussion with members of the Lerik Apple Producer Group and representatives of Lerik State Agriculture Development Center (SADC) and the District Executive Authority (DEA) provided valuable insights into the positive impact of this initiative that was having a transformative effect on farmers. This was followed by a meeting with the Lerik Potato Producer Group in Kalakhan village. The group comprising of young farmers, shared their enthusiasm at being part of the 1 hectare of demo plots that test 4 local varieties and 4 international varieties of potatoes suitable for mountain areas. The experiment is overseen by the Scientific Research Institute for Vegetable Growing and experts from the institute are monitoring the plots and at the end will select varieties that can be popularized as most productive for the district. In addition, certificates were presented to staff of SADC, DEA and farmers who were part of the study visits.



Discussion with study visit participants on lessons learned, Lankaran

The next day the delegation met with the Fadak Strawberry Group in Jalilabad and discussed key issues facing strawberry producers in the region which is the main center for strawberry production in Azerbaijan. A certificate was presented to chair of the group who participated in the study visit to Türkiye and provided details of the new technology he had seen in Türkiye. This was followed by site visits in Yardimli district where 1 hectare of potato demo plots had been launched to test 8 varieties of potatoes in partnership with the Institute for Vegetable Growing. The team met all 8 members of the Yardimli Potato Producer Group and viewed the demo plots in Avash and Deman villages. Certificates were presented to participants of the study visits from the district including officials of SADC and DEA. These field visits highlighted the importance of tailored interventions to address key challenges in the fruit and vegetable value chains including lack of soil testing, poor quality of seeds and saplings, agro-technical knowledge and collaboration among small producers. Through these meaningful interactions, the team reaffirmed the EU's commitment to supporting sustainable agricultural development in the region and driving positive change and empowerment.



Study visit participants awarded certificates, Lankaran

The mission concluded with a meeting attended by 35 participants of study visits from the remaining four districts- Jalilabad, Astara, Masalli and Lankaran. There was a lively exchange of ideas and experiences focused on the current state of agriculture, the challenges farmers faced, impressions gained from the visits, and application of the knowledge acquired by participants. At the end certificates were awarded to the participants.

As the project continues, the European Union remains dedicated to supporting the development of the Lankaran-Astara Economic Region, in particular by increasing the competitiveness of the fruit and vegetable sub-sector. This commitment drives significant progress in fostering economic growth and diversification and empowering local communities.