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ENHANCING POTATO AND APPLE PRODUCTION IN LERIK: EU4LANKARAN PROJECT'S VITAL ROLE

Lerik district, located in Azerbaijan's Lankaran-Astara Economic Region, is renowned for its unique beauty and the longevity of its population. The district is now witnessing promising developments in its agriculture sector, particularly in the cultivation of potatoes and apples. These crops, crucial for the local economy, are now the focus of substantial efforts aimed at improving production quality and market competitiveness.



Potato, Lerik



Apple

The "Analysis of Apple and Potato Value Chains in Lerik District" report, developed within the "EU4Lankaran" project funded by the European Union, highlights the current state of these key agricultural value chains and addresses possible solutions to solve the issues facing the sub-sectors. The project aims to improve the productivity and income of local farmers through targeted support and strategic interventions covering new scientific practices, the education of farmers, the introduction of high-yielding varieties, proper care, branding, and marketing of the products.

Agriculture is the backbone of Lerik's economy, and apples and potatoes are the most important crops cultivated in the district. Apple production in Lerik faces significant hurdles, including outdated farming methods and insufficient infrastructure. Although Lerik has 53% of the region's apple orchards, it only accounts for 24.1% of the total apple output due to suboptimal yields from small, fragmented farms and inadequate irrigation systems. The widespread use of traditional cultivation techniques, the lack of knowledge of proper agro-technical care, and limited access to quality inputs further exacerbate the low productivity. Insufficient modern storage facilities also result in considerable post-harvest losses, reducing the quality and marketability of apples and thereby restricting farmers' access to broader markets and impacting their income. These issues underscore the urgent need for investments in modern agricultural practices and infrastructure to boost productivity, improve quality, and expand market access for Lerik's apple producers.



Potato plot, Lerik

Potato farming in Lerik faces significant constraints due to the district's mountainous terrain, which hampers large-scale mechanization and leads to inconsistent yields. Although Lerik accounts for 14.9% of the cultivated potato area in the Lankaran-Astara region, it produces only 8.1% of the potatoes, highlighting inefficiencies in production. Similar to apple production, the small, fragmented nature of potato farms restricts scalability and profitability, as farmers struggle with limited access to quality seeds and fertilizers. High transportation costs and a lack of efficient supply chain networks further limit market access, affecting the overall economic viability of potato farming. Addressing these issues through investments in infrastructure and improved market linkages is essential to enhance the productivity and income potential of Lerik's potato farmers. By overcoming these challenges, Lerik could significantly boost its agricultural output, contributing more effectively to the region's economy and ensuring better market penetration for its potato produce.



Apple orchard, Lerik



Harvesting potatoes by hand

One of the successful farmers in Lerik is Javid Hashimli grows apples and plants vegetables. Let's get familiar with his story better.

Mr. Javid Hashimli, a young farmer in Lerik, grows apples in a 0.5-hectare orchard and cultivates potatoes, tomatoes, and other vegetables for personal consumption. Additionally, he invests in livestock. To secure enough water for his farm, Javid built a stone container that holds 15 cubic tons of water. Water from mountain springs and artesian wells is collected in the reservoir using gravity. Javid's simple irrigation system, consisting of a few hoses connected to his orchard and potato plot, is sufficient to irrigate his apple trees.



Apple saplings

Following this analysis, the project has taken steps to enhance the productivity and income of local farmers by establishing the first Intensive Apple Demonstration Orchards in the district. Through a selection process, seven leading local farmers have been provided with 2,010 apple saplings of five well-known international commercial cultivars: Starkrimson, Pink Lady, Golden Delicious, Gala, and Granny Smith. Potato Demonstration Plots were established in the fields of eight farmers. These farmers received a total of 3,155 kg of potato seeds including four local varieties (Sevinj, Chanlibel, Vaqif, Amiri) and four foreign varieties (Colombo, Orkestr, Sorayya, Bernina).

Beyond establishing orchards and plots in Lerik, the project initiated the formation of apple and potato Producer Groups to strengthen collective bargaining power and improve market access. By fostering cooperation among farmers, the project aims to create economies of scale, reduce production costs, and enhance the competitiveness of Lerik's agricultural products in both domestic and international markets.

Moreover, the project extended its support to the apple and potato Producer Groups in Lerik, helping them apply for tenders to obtain machinery and equipment through the UNDP project. This initiative is set to boost agricultural productivity and sustainability in the region, providing local farmers with the essential tools and resources needed to enhance their yield and quality.

As part of ongoing initiatives, the project aims to enhance the branding of Lerik's agricultural products. The "Lerik apple" and "Lerik potato" will be promoted as high-quality, eco-friendly premium products, leveraging the distinct characteristics of produce from the district.



Meeting with potato farmers in Lerik district

Stay tuned for more updates from the "EU Support to Lankaran-Astara Economic Region of Azerbaijan" project.