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ENHANCING THE MANDARIN VALUE CHAIN IN ASTARA WITH EU SUPPORT

The "EU Support to the Lankaran-Astara Economic Region of Azerbaijan" project has developed another value chain report, this time focusing on mandarin production in the Astara district.

This region, particularly Astara, is crucial for Azerbaijan's mandarin production, contributing significantly to the country's output. Over recent years, the agricultural sector here has grown due to initiatives aimed at boosting productivity and market access for local farmers.



Mandarin garden, Astara



Mandarin garden, Astara

Astara district, a leading citrus fruit cultivation area, has seen a significant increase in mandarin production. Since 2000, the mandarin orchard area has expanded over fivefold, reaching 1977 hectares by 2022, and production has increased fourfold from 11,213 tons to 44,475.5 tons. Astara now accounts for 87.8% of Azerbaijan's mandarin output. However, challenges such as aging orchards, outdated agricultural practices, insufficient storage facilities, and reliance on the Russian market for exports persist. Modernization and infrastructure development are essential for sustainable growth.

The mandarin value chain analysis in Astara revealed several key findings. Many orchards have old trees needing renewal, and local farmers lack awareness of modern farming techniques. High labor costs and inadequate maintenance practices result in low yields and quality. Proper storage facilities are missing, causing rapid spoilage, and there are no local processing facilities for value-added products. The dependence on the Russian market is risky due to market volatility, and efforts to access EU and Gulf markets are hindered by stringent quality standards and certification requirements.

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Despite the numerous challenges and difficulties in mandarin production, some farmers in Astara have achieved success. Let's get to know them better.

Fazil Gurbanov, a mandarin producer from Kijaba village, manages a 2-hectare orchard in a hilly area. He pumps water from 2 km away and uses drip irrigation. Despite the tough terrain, he believes this technology will ease spraying and fertilization. His main challenges are labor costs and lack of storage, forcing him to sell his produce immediately at low prices.

Ahlinaz Nazarova owns 2.02 hectares of mandarin, orange, and feijoa orchards, producing 1.8 tons of citrus fruits last year. She started with 0.5 hectares in 2018 and expanded using profits and savings from her job. Ahlinaz believes women can increase income by avoiding unnecessary expenses and values knowledge exchange among farmers.

The "EU4Lankaran" project, funded by the European Union and implemented by WeGlobal and its partners, supports improving the mandarin value chain. Key areas of focus include:

Modernization of orchards. The project supports renewing old orchards and introducing high-yield cultivars. Intensive Mandarin Demo Orchards covering 2 hectares will be established among nine farmers in Astara, with 1,410 saplings distributed (early ripening: Okitsu Wase, mid-season: Carlic, and late ripening: Un-shio). Farmers will receive training on modern agricultural practices to enhance productivity and quality.



Mandarin garden, Astara

Bankable projects. Research on potential areas for bankable projects in Astara aims to boost the mandarin value chain and agricultural productivity. Focuses include modern irrigation systems, cold storage facilities, and processing plants. Forming cooperatives and training on modern practices aim to enhance productivity, market access, and sustainable economic growth.



Mandarin garden, Astara

Market diversification and branding. Efforts are underway to diversify markets beyond Russia, targeting the EU and Gulf countries. The project aims to help farmers meet standards and obtain certifications for these markets. Branding and marketing strategies will promote Astara mandarins as natural products with health benefits, emphasizing their lower sugar content compared to other varieties.

Training and capacity building. The project organized training sessions for 185 citrus farmers from Masalli, Lankaran, and Astara, with 54 from Astara. Study visits to Bati Akdeniz Agricultural Research Institute in Antalya, Türkiye, were facilitated to learn advanced citrus farming practices. These initiatives aimed to enhance the knowledge and skills of local farmers, enabling them to adopt better practices and increase competitiveness.

In conclusion, the EU4Lankaran project's support is vital in overcoming challenges faced by the mandarin sector in Astara. With continued efforts and strategic interventions, the region is poised for sustainable growth and enhanced market presence, benefiting the local economy and improving farmers' livelihoods. Stay tuned for more updates from the "EU Support to Lankaran-Astara Economic Region of Azerbaijan" project.



Mandarin garden, Astara

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