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BOOSTING POTATO FARMING IN YARDIMLI: EU SUPPORT FOR AGRICULTURAL GROWTH



Potato plot, Yardimli

The "EU Support to the Lankaran-Astara Economic Region of Azerbaijan" ("EU4Lankaran") project has developed value chain reports for districts in the region. One report focuses on the potato value chain in Yardimli district, a mountainous area where agriculture, especially potato farming, is key. Local potato production meets demand, and cultivation areas have expanded recently. The "EU4Lankaran" project supports this by addressing challenges and offering strategic interventions to boost performance.



Potato, Yardimli

The report reveals potato cultivation increased from 460 hectares in 2000 to 928 hectares in 2022, with production rising from 4,798 tons to 8,595 tons. However, yield per hectare is low due to factors like low-quality seed potatoes and limited innovative techniques. The district's terrain and climate pose challenges, with farmers relying on rain-fed agriculture and facing issues from climate change. Inadequate irrigation and storage facilities force farmers to sell quickly, often at lower prices.

Despite the challenges and difficulties, some farmers have found success in potato growing over the years. One such farmer is Vagif Agayev. Let's take a closer look at his success story.

Vagif Agayev, initially focused on beekeeping, sold honey and advised other farmers in the field. Between 2008 and 2010, he benefited from the "Farmer to Farmer Support" project, financed by the World Bank. With the project's support, a demonstration plot for the Russian "Udachi" potato seed was established on his farm. Since then, he has been selling potato seeds to farmers in Sirig and nearby villages. He set up a small sales booth and now cultivates potatoes on 30 hectares. Encouraged by his success, Vagif expanded to selling other farm supplies, including seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. He also offers agrarian advisory services to potato farmers.

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The value chain analysis of the potato in Yardimli district highlights critical issues. Farmers lack access to high-quality, certified seed potatoes and suitable fertilizers, increasing disease risks. Fertilizers and pesticides are scarce locally, leading farmers to rely on less effective organic manure. Potato marketing is poorly organized, with sales mainly from September to March. High transportation costs and competition from imported potatoes from Iran and Russia add pressure on local farmers.

Many farmers face challenges reaching markets due to high transportation costs and mountainous terrain, leading to the search for alternative solutions. Let's consider a specific example of this challenge.

Alar village, the largest in Yardimli district, has 100 of the region's 980 hectares of potato cultivation in 2023. Located 15 km from Yardimli district center and 53 km from Masalli city, the mountainous village is inaccessible by ordinary cars during autumn and winter. Villagers sell their produce in Masalli and buy essentials from the town.



Potato plot, Yardimli

The difficult road conditions increase transport costs for farmers. To address this, Mirzaaga Janiyev, the local representative of Executive Power of Yardimli District, organized a transport schedule. Farmers notify him of their market trips, and he coordinates with truck owners to arrange shared transport, reducing costs. This system is also used for purchasing seed potatoes and selling livestock.



Potato plot, Yardimli

The "EU4Lankaran" project addresses key challenges in Yardimli district. In April 2024, the project established Potato Demonstration Plots in five villages, distributing 3,015 kg of premium seed potatoes to eight farmers (News flash Vol 2). The project conducts research to identify potential areas for bankable projects, including storage, processing facilities, and branding initiatives. It supports the development of the "Deman Kartofu" brand to market Yardimli potatoes as premium, ecologically clean produce. Additionally, the project formed a Potato Producer Group to enhance collective bargaining, market access, and shared infrastructure investment. These efforts aim to improve productivity and profitability for farmers.

The potato value chain in Yardimli district, though facing several challenges, shows significant potential for improvement with the right interventions. The support of "EU4Lankaran" project is expected to enhance the productivity and profitability of potato farming in the district. With continued efforts, Yardimli potatoes can achieve greater recognition and market success, benefiting the local economy and improving the livelihoods of farmers.



Potato, Yardimli

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