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STIMULATING MASALLI'S TOMATO LEGACY: CHALLENGES AND GROWTH IN FOCUS

As a continuation of the series, this edition focuses on the Tomato Value Chain in Masalli, developed by the EU4Lankaran project. The tomato value chain in Masalli district of Lankaran-Astara Economic Region is undergoing significant transformations, and facing challenges and opportunities. Masalli, one of the key districts in this region, has a strong agricultural base, where tomato production plays a crucial role.

Tomato plot, Masalli district

Masalli district, with its favorable climatic conditions and fertile soil, has long been a hub for tomato cultivation. However, the area under tomato cultivation has fluctuated over the years. From 829 hectares in 2000, it reduced to 444 hectares by 2019, slightly increasing to 525 hectares by 2022. Despite these fluctuations, the district has shown resilience with an increase in productivity. In 2022, Masalli's tomato productivity reached 33,100 kg per hectare, significantly higher than the regional average.

One of the key findings from recent studies is the need for improved agricultural practices and infrastructure in Masalli. Small farm sizes, fragmentation, and limited access to high-quality inputs are significant challenges. The district's soil, which often has a high pH, requires specific amendments to ensure optimal tomato growth. However, the absence of a local laboratory for soil testing in Masalli means that farmers have to rely on facilities in Lankaran, adding time and effort to the process. Moreover, the lack of training in fertilizer application has led to overuse, further degrading soil quality.



Planting tomato seedlings, Masalli

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Despite these challenges, local farmer Ilkin Shukurov has made significant strides in enhancing tomato cultivation over the past decade. Mr. Shukurov set out to transform the agricultural landscape near the village of Sharafa. With strong family support and various financial resources, he embarked on a project to establish greenhouse tomato production, investing heavily in modern infrastructure and equipment. He built modern greenhouses covering 2 hectares and a refrigerated storage facility with a capacity of 1,200 tons. His project boosted local agriculture and created 60 new jobs, including 20 seasonal positions, contributing to the community's economic development.

The report highlights the need for a structured seed market with reputable companies providing high-quality seeds tailored to Masalli's climate and soil conditions. This would improve both the quality and yield of tomatoes, ensuring consistent production that can meet both domestic and international demand. To support tomato production in Masalli, the "EU4Lankaran" project aims at to establish Tomato Demonstration Plots in the district. Approximately 50,000 tomato seedlings will be distributed to 8 farmers from 6 villages in Masalli. The opening ceremony for the Tomato Demonstration Plot in Tekle village is scheduled for July 3rd, 2024.



Tomato harvest, Masalli

In conclusion, while Masalli's tomato value chain faces several challenges, the support provided by initiatives like the “EU4Lankaran” project is paving the way for substantial improvements. By focusing on enhancing agricultural practices, ensuring access to quality inputs, and strengthening marketing and branding efforts, Masalli has the potential to significantly boost its tomato production, contributing to the overall economic development of the region.



Tomato plot, Masalli

The marketing and branding of Masalli's tomatoes face significant challenges. Despite the high demand for this major crop, local farmers often struggle with market access and bargaining power. To address these issues, the project is supporting Masalli district by developing a regional tomato brand, and market outlooks and snapshots to enhance tomato production and marketing efforts.

Additionally, the project takes initiatives aiming at improving branding and marketing strategies for Masalli tomatoes. By promoting good agricultural practices, the project aims to improve the quality of tomatoes produced in the district. This not only benefits farmers through higher yields but also enhances the marketability of Masalli tomatoes, both locally and internationally.

Within the “EU4Lankaran” project, Tomato Producer Group has been established, enabling farmers to pool resources, share best practices, and negotiate better prices. The Group will enhance productivity and market access by fostering collaboration and improving efficiency.



Tomato harvest, Masalli

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