



Moldovan Families Turn Surplus Milk Into Cash

As is the daily routine of most Moldovan villagers, the first thing Elena Manic does every morning is milk her family cow. During this activity, she dreams of a better life for her five children. Village life in Moldova is not easy. Generally, villagers who have money and a steady income are rare.

Traditionally, Moldovan villagers used milk only for family consumption, and never had a way of selling what was left over. Most people use their products as a form of exchange for goods and services, but this may not work for everything they need.

Elena started to sell milk to a business cooperative, Laptisor-COM, which has operated in her village since 1998. It was among the first milk-collecting business cooperatives created in Moldova with the support of USAID. Elena learned about the USAID program from a group which researched the possibility of setting up such a business in their village.

When Laptisor-COM was founded, it collected only thirty-two liters of milk in the first week of operation. However, more and more villagers became involved each month, and by the end of the first year, the average amount collected reached 400 liters a day.



Photo: Constantin Salagor/Private Farmers Assistance Program

Elena Manic is a beneficiary of one of the eighteen milk collection business cooperatives that exist in Moldova today. She earns about \$50 per month which is a significant income for countryside living.

Milk has become a profitable business for Elena Manic of Loganesti, Hancesti region of Moldova.

Initiated by USAID, many of the co-ops have opened milk collection sites in other locations, thus expanding their business. This program contributes to the business success of private farmers and ensures that the transition to private farms results in a viable economic development.

According to business manager Galina Sacultan, the sale of milk is the only source of income for many rural villagers. Villagers like Elena Manic meet annually to discuss strategies on how to continue their association with the business cooperative. They recently installed a refrigerated milk collection tank purchased with their own money and with matching funds from USAID.

“Before, I used to think of going abroad to work illegally in order to support my family like many villagers do. However, thanks to USAID, I have confidence in tomorrow. Maybe for many, this is an insignificant business, but for us its another step towards a healthy market economy.

- Elena Manic

Now, Laptisor-COM collects over 1.5 tons of milk per day. These numbers don't only demonstrate the success of the cooperative, but also the achievements of people like Elena Manic. Today, Elena happily reports there is a way to transform her surplus milk into cash money. With the help of her milk sales, she now can buy her children everything they need and want.

Her story has become an example for many local villagers, and over time, they too have joined her in the traditional morning walk to this milk collection station. With smiles on their faces and buckets of milk in their hands, they all know that life is not that hard anymore. By turning milk into cash, they learned what it means to do business in Moldova.

