

SUCCESS STORY

Modest Investments in Post Harvest Handling Can Make Huge Differences in EU Market Competitiveness

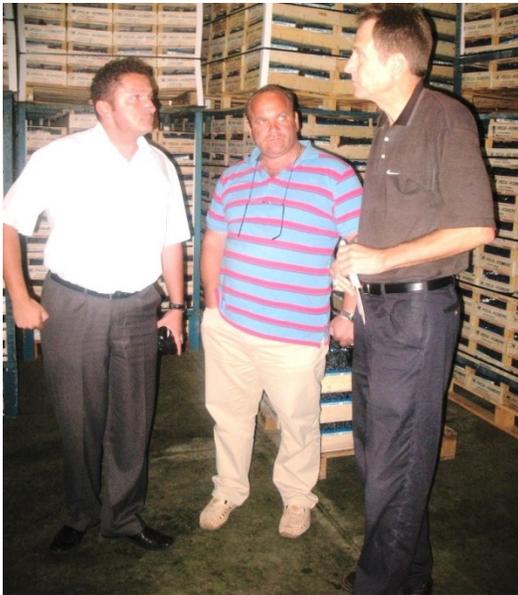


Photo: AgBiz Program Staff

International Expert Dr. David Picha (right) Providing Onsite Technical Assistance to Blashko Temkov, Peca Komerc Owner (middle), led by Lovre Ristevski, AgBiz Value Chain Coordinator (left)

In addition to value chain activities supporting post harvest technologies, AgBiz supported six business expansion projects implemented by individual companies in the fresh fruit and vegetables value chain that had the objective of improving the companies' post harvest handling physical facilities and technologies.

Macedonian exporters of fresh produce must be aware of regional and EU market requirements regarding the appearance, taste and texture of their fresh produce exports. Companies need to extend product shelf life to obtain higher prices, as well expand their market presence in existing markets and to penetrate new, higher value EU markets for fresh produce.

For more than two years AgBiz has been helping Macedonian fresh produce companies at both the firm and value chain level to improve their export competitiveness by providing support related to product handling, grading, packaging and food safety. Now AgBiz is playing an even more important role in improving the competitiveness and profitability of Macedonian fresh produce companies by increasing their knowledge of modern, fresh produce post-harvest handling technologies, and how to effectively adopt these competitiveness enhancing techniques.

Profitable expansion of the Macedonian fresh produce industry requires cost and quality competitiveness improvements. Macedonian companies need to take several steps to accelerate their rate of improvement in these critical areas, or there will be a decline in export sales and profitability. If a substantial effort is not made to accelerate post harvest handling improvements, a few progressive firms will identify and pursue the necessary measures, but the industry as a whole will continue to lag behind, lose competitiveness, and grower and exporter incomes will decline in one of the largest categories of Macedonian exports.

To help customers enhance their post harvest handling procedures and practices, AgBiz engaged a highly qualified international expert to advise, educate, train and increase the capacity of domestic fresh produce operators to adopt modern and highly competitive post harvest handling practices and technologies. AgBiz brought Dr. David Picha to Macedonia from the USA to provide high level technical support to the country's fresh produce exporters.

"I was impressed by the agriculture in your country! You have many sunny days and excellent climatic conditions, favorable for growing different agricultural products which are in demand in EU and US markets. With modest, not expensive investments in post harvest handling enhancements, Macedonian products can be successfully positioned in EU retail supermarkets"; said Dr. Picha.

During his two week assignment David visited 15 of the largest exporters of Macedonian fresh produce. Each AgBiz customer received onsite technical assistance for improving their post harvest handling. After the intensive field work, a one day, highly technical training workshop on How to Improve Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Post-Harvest Handling for Export was organized by AgBiz and attended by 11 representatives of six companies. As a result of this activity, Macedonian fresh produce companies have become more aware and knowledgeable about harvesting techniques, steps for preparing fresh products for market, cooling and storing, humidity, efficient operations and standards and conditions for pack houses. Many of the techniques Dr. Picha transferred to customers can be implemented at a very modest cost and involved enhanced management practices.

Now Macedonian fresh produce marketers better understand how to handle fresh produce and minimize produce quality deterioration through such low cost techniques as proper storage temperature and humidity control and effective use of sulfur. AgBiz is planning a series of follow-up events to further develop the post harvest handling capabilities of our customers.