

# SUCCESS STORY

## USAID's AgBiz Program Helps Macedonian Agribusinesses Understand how to Access IPARD Funds



Photo: AgBiz Program Staff

Trainer Natasha Ljubeckij (leaning) at IPARD Workshop for Processed Vegetables Customers and their Consultants

***As part of its Access to Finance activities, in 2008 AgBiz organized a workshop involving case studies on how Bulgarian and Romanian companies used SAPARD funds. This was to help Macedonian agribusinesses learn from the experience of neighboring countries in accessing EU funds. The world economic slowdown has seriously restricted the amount of loans available to Macedonian agribusinesses, and that has negatively affected their competitiveness. In mid-2009, AgBiz organized two successful IPARD training sessions to help our customers and their consultants become acquainted with the processes, role and responsibilities of applicants, qualifications for approval, eligible and non-eligible costs, financing considerations and reimbursement, and the criteria for project evaluation. This knowledge will enable them to be ready for the call for IPARD applications, and improved their ability to submit winning applications.***

During the process of EU accession Macedonia is entitled to use Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) funds. The IPA Rural Development Program (IPARD) is expected to become available by the end of 2009, and is designed to contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas and the modernization agriculture and agribusiness so participants can meet Community standards. Utilization of these funds depends on the absorption capacity of the sector and its ability to develop and apply for funding for viable projects that are in line with the very specific IPARD requirements. To successfully apply for IPARD support Macedonia must stimulate higher awareness of IPARD measures and build the capacity of potential beneficiaries and their consultants. Therefore, this summer AgBiz organized two IPARD workshops for participants from three of our value chains. In July and August 2009, 47 participants from Macedonian vegetable processing, wine and fresh produce companies and their consultants attended a series of two-days intensive training on “**How to Design Proposals, Apply for and Manage IPARD Funds**”.

The objective of the IPARD workshops was to help customers in those value chains better understand the eligibility criteria, procedures and kind of projects that can qualify for IPARD funding, and to increase the capacity of managers to utilize IPARD benefits when they become available. The workshop for Processed Vegetables VC participants was organized in partnership with the Macedonian Association of Processors. In addition to AgBiz customers, several local consultants participated on the workshop. Highly relevant workshop sessions provided company managers and potential IPARD consultants with comprehensive and up-to-date knowledge on the measures, business plan model, guiding documents, technical criteria and the food safety and environment requirements needed for successful IPARD applications. This helped participants understand the process, the role and responsibilities of participants, types of investments, eligible and non-eligible costs, financing of investments, reimbursement and project evaluation criteria for.

*“Accessing IPARD funding is an excellent opportunity to upgrade my operations to EU standards, but obviously applying for some of the EU40 million in IPARD funding will not be easy. We will likely have to work with a consultant to develop a winning application. However, the good news is that those costs are reimbursable if the application is successful.”* said a processed vegetables company participant.

Participants were encouraged to start preparing soon so that once the call for proposals is announced they can apply with high quality applications. AgBiz will continue to identify the most competitive and suitable sources of finance for our customers to help them increase their export market competitiveness.