

## SUCCESS STORY

### Wild Gathered Products Firms Build Their Own Legacy



The Shumski Plod Association Founding Meeting, Supported by USAID's AgBiz Program

Photo: AgBiz Program Staff

**“Now, we can be more competitive, speak with one voice and better develop our businesses and value chain.”**

Mile Gjozev, Association President, at the Foundation Meeting

**By helping to establish the Wild Gathered Products Trade Association, AgBiz contributed to the success and sustainability of the WGP value chain by:**

- **Stimulating cooperation, communication and linkages between participants;**
- **Launching a forum where value chain competitiveness and development constraints will be identified and addressed;**
- **Creating an environment where optimal approaches to the GoM can be developed; and therefore**
- **Improving the value chain's export competitiveness.**

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The Wild Gathered Products (WGP) Value Chain plays a significant role in Macedonian agribusiness since nearly all of its products are exported. At the same time it provides income to a significant number of households in low income rural areas.

USAID's AgBiz Program recognized the export potential of the value chain, but also identified a number of weaknesses, including a lack of cooperation between participants, and its low profile.

With the aim of enhancing the export competitiveness of the entire value chain, AgBiz took the initiative to gather all relevant players in one location to discuss value chain development. Therefore, on November 8th we organized a one-day Round Table, where we presented a WGP Value Chain Profile developed by AgBiz, and discussed the potential benefits of establishing an association to serve members priority needs, especially enhanced export competitiveness.

The twenty-six Round Table participants elected an Association Founding Committee, and empowered it to take all necessary steps to develop and conduct an Association Founding Meeting. AgBiz applauded this action, and agreed to support the initiative by hiring a local consultant to help the Committee develop the Association's organizational structure and registration, as well as its Annual Operational Plan and Budget, and to help conduct the Founding Meeting.

On 26<sup>th</sup> of March, five months after the initiative was launched, the Founding Meeting took place in Veles, and the Wild Gathered Products Trade Association "Shumski Plod was established. 10 companies representing over 50% of Macedonian exports of WGP's formally joined the Association at that time. The active involvement of these 10 major players will send a strong signal to all other WGP companies to also join the Association.

Later, only few weeks into its existence, the Association realized its very first success. The Ministry for Environment and Physical Planning (MEPP) ban on exports of Morchela mushrooms was lifted following a meeting with Association representatives and MEPP where members jointly presented the reasons why the ban was not logical, and a very inefficient way to achieve MEPP objectives. As a result, WGP companies will benefit this year from the collection and export sale of this first class mushroom.

The Shumski Plod Association now has the potential to become a leverage point for AgBiz support, and an effective means for value chain participants to communicate with the GoM. Both will make a significant contribution toward enhancing the competitiveness of the WGP Value Chain, and the wellbeing of all its many participants.