

SUCCESS STORY

Adding Value via Quality Standards & Food Safety Systems



Processing Wild Mushrooms

Following HACCP Principals

Photo: AgBiz Program Staff



Implementation of Food Safety Principals inside a Wild Gathered Products Company

Implementation of food safety standards is one of the capacity enhancing activities supported by the AgBiz Program. In addition to HACCP and organic certification, seven companies have been trained in the International Food Standard and 14 Macedonian agribusinesses are in the process of implementing GlobalGAP.

Over the past couple of years, Macedonian companies in the Wild Gathered Products (WGP) Value Chain have become aware of the many benefits of implementing quality standards and food safety systems. Experience gained through participating in well-known trade fairs and study tours organized by AgBiz has helped Macedonian processors and exporters to understand the need and importance of food safety assurance, if they want to enter new markets and sustain themselves in existing markets.

HACCP is one of the most widely accepted food safety systems designed to enhance trade between countries. In other words, to trade internationally it is necessary to utilize HACCP food safety principles and being HACCP certified is a basic requirement in many international markets. For HACCP to work and to experience its benefits it must be implemented and maintained at all levels and by all parties involved in the value chain; e.g., between producers, processors, wholesalers and/or the retailers with whom they trade.

Implementation of food safety systems based on HACCP principles is a legal requirement for all Macedonian food operators from the 1st of January 2009. Within Macedonia there was concern that food-related firms were not able to adapt the standard in the required time frame. This was recognized as an obstacle to WGP value chain competitiveness enchantment at both the primary consolidator level, where most participants are microenterprises or individuals, and at the larger exporting companies that source their raw materials from the consolidators.

AgBiz recognized the common need for HACCP implementation support and supported WGP value chain participants to add value and competitiveness to their products by implementing food safety systems and quality assurance standards in their operations. In partnership with the WGP companies, AgBiz engaged four local consulting companies and two local consultants to implement HACCP-based food safety systems in 30 consolidator companies and in the three largest WGP exporters. Additionally four WGP exporters were supported to achieve organic certification.

This set of activities had a positive impact on not just the consolidator and exporter businesses themselves, but also positively affected the entire supply chain by establishing long-term cooperation arrangements between consolidators and exporters and assuring a continued market for the wild products gathered by an estimated 60,000 low income WGP gatherers.

"This is an enormous move in the right direction for the future of the Wild Gathered Products Value Chain. We are dedicated to the continued implementation of joint activities such as HACCP implementation through the newly established "Sumski Plod" association. It's not only better to offer safe products to our buyers, but HACCP also makes our businesses more sustainable while benefiting from lower implementation the costs achieved through association supported group implementation"; said Mr. Dragan Markovski, a WGP consolidator.

The WGP companies AgBiz has supported are now able to experience the benefits of the newly established quality standards and food safety systems and are able to offer safer products, achieve better prices and maintain customer satisfaction.