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## HELPING SRI LANKA TO GROW !

AgEnt is a dynamic USAID funded private sector agro-enterprise development initiative successfully assisting companies and entrepreneurs with viable business/marketing plans to expand existing operations or start-up new ventures targeted at both domestic and export markets.

### WHY MANY SRI LANKAN MEN AND WOMEN MEDIUM/SMALL SCALE AGRO-ENTERPRISE ENTREPRENEURS ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS AT BOTH A DOMESTIC AND EXPORT MARKETING LEVEL

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There is little doubt that the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka's (FCCISL) just concluded first " Entrepreneur of the Year 1994 " awards program has been a stunning success.

And AgEnt, USAID's major private sector agro-enterprise initiative, is particularly proud to have been able to assist a significant number of category and merit award winning enterprises to successfully expand their businesses in various ways (i.e. through the introduction of new equipment/technologies; participation in overseas trade fairs to promote their products; new products research and development; introduction of new higher added value export crops etc).

Against this brief background (bearing in mind that AgEnt has made nearly 300 " shared investment grants " to mainly medium/small/micro size entrepreneurs over the last two years) the project can confirm that it is midway through a unique, indepth assessment of " What makes Sri Lankan men and women medium/small scale entrepreneurs stand out from the crowd ! " ; many of whom are very much playing a key part in the government's important private sector " engine of growth strategy " , particularly in the export arena.

In the supporting chart we have identified and weighted eleven illustrative, key criteria which we believe lie behind the successful sustainable establishment of many medium/small scale Sri Lankan agro-enterprise entrepreneurs, buttressed by the following additional comments -

1. Many of AgEnt's medium/small scale agro-enterprise entrepreneurs started their businesses on a " shoe string " ( or just Rps 5000/- begged and borrowed from the bank ! ).
2. A sheer determination to succeed, linked to an unfailing belief in their enterprise concept/product marketing opportunity, has often played a critically important role in carrying them through the " rough spots " i.e. when everything seemed to be stacked against them !
3. Innovation has likewise played a tremendous part in the success of many a medium/small scale agro-enterprise entrepreneur's business, particularly at the production development/processing level i.e. often they have had to develop/build from " scratch " new technologies and equipment simply because none existed before and/or were prohibitively expensive to purchase !
4. Due to their considerable, analytical and perceptive judgement skills ( particularly an ability to spot the " market gap/opportunity " ) many have been able to achieve success without the need for a formal university degree or other high level business qualification.
5. Within the highly competitive export marketplace the top echelon of Sri Lankan men and women medium/small scale agro-enterprise entrepreneurs are achieving impressive results, proving that they can " grow the export component of their businesses against the toughest competition in the world through uniqueness in product development/positioning and promotion ".

6. **Between the genders it is apparent that leading small scale women agro-enterprise entrepreneurs in particular are equally skilled/successful at developing/running their enterprises compared to their opposite numbers ; notwithstanding that differences in management style/approach can sometimes exist.**
  
7. **In the highly competitive international marketplace, considerable personal communication/selling skills are needed to persuade importers/distributors who can deliver to take on a new import line.**

**However, the majority of medium/small scale agro-enterprise export entrepreneurs whom AgEnt has been fortunate to work alongside todate, have proven surprisingly adept at quickly learning to manage this critically important marketing mix discipline. Put another way, if you can't sell your product you will never be in the race to win !**

**In summary, the AgEnt Project is convinced that there are many more budding Sri Lankan men/women agro-enterprise entrepreneurs waiting in the wings to be identified and assisted; and once unleashed they will play a key role in helping both the domestic/export sectors of the economy to even more dynamically grow !**

**(Chart attached)**

**KEY CRITERIA CONTRIBUTING TO THE  
SUCCESS OF MEDIUM/SMALL SCALE SRI LANKAN  
" MEN/WOMEN " AGRO-ENTERPRISE ENTREPRENEURS AT  
BOTH A DOMESTIC AND EXPORT MARKETS LEVEL**

SECTOR	LOW ( SCORE ) HIGH				
	1	2	3	4	5
<p><b>1. STAYING POWER/ TENACITY</b></p> <p>(Go that " extra mile "; Never take " no " for an answer ! )</p>					X
<p><b>2. COMPETITIVE PRODUCTS AND OPPORTUNITIES MARKET RESEARCH</b></p> <p>( Do your homework well; find that " market niche " ! )</p>				X	
<p><b>3. PRODUCE A SUPERIOR QUALITY PRODUCT WITH A MARKETING EDGE</b></p> <p>( Build a better mousetrap ! )</p>					X
<p><b>4. CONTINUE TO IDENTIFY, RESEARCH, DEVELOP AND LAUNCH INNOVATIVE NEW PRODUCTS</b></p> <p>( Always stay one ahead of the competition ! )</p>				X	
<p><b>5. CONTINUOUSLY PARTICIPATE/ATTEND OVERSEAS TRADE FAIRS AND NEW TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT SHOWS</b></p> <p>(A new idea, however small, can often be worth its weight in gold ! )</p>				X	
<p><b>6. PLOUGH BACK YOUR PROFITS INTO THE BUSINESS; DON'T GO FOR SHORT TERM GAIN</b></p> <p>( Once built, a fortress is hard to destroy ! )</p>				X	
<p><b>7. DEVELOP A CLOSE/PERSONAL BOND WITH YOUR KEY CUSTOMERS</b></p> <p>( The first lifeblood of your business ! )</p>					X
<p><b>8. RIGIDLY MANAGE THE FINANCIAL COMPONENT OF YOUR BUSINESS</b></p> <p>(Without a strong cash flow, it can often be hard to survive! )</p>					X
<p><b>9. DEVELOP AND REWARD YOUR STAFF</b></p> <p>( The other lifeblood of your business ! )</p>				X	
<p><b>10. CONTINUOUSLY EDUCATE YOURSELF IN THE LATEST BASIC MANAGEMENT: FINANCIAL: PRODUCTION: MARKETING: SALESMANSHIP ETC TRENDS</b></p> <p>( A thirst for knowledge will never be lost ! )</p>				X	
<p><b>11. BELIEF IN THE CONTRIBUTION YOUR ENTERPRISE IS MAKING TO THE ECONOMY/ WELFARE OF THE COUNTRY</b></p> <p>( Fly the flag ; be proud to be Sri Lankan ! )</p>					X