

PROJECT: STDF/PG/447

**ENABLING MARKET ACCESS FOR TAJIK AGRICULTURAL
PRODUCTS THROUGH IMPROVED FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM**

FINAL REPORT

JANUARY 2023

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PROJECT INFORMATION

Beneficiary

Republic of Tajikistan

Project number and title

STDF/PG/: 447

ENABLING MARKET ACCESS FOR TAJIK AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS THROUGH IMPROVED FOOD SAFETY SYSTEM

Budget

Total project value: US\$ 1,157,751

Approved STDF contribution: US\$ 890,676

Disbursed STDF contribution (i.e. during the project lifetime): US\$ 890,676

Period of implementation

Insert Implementing Agency's name and abbreviation (where available).

01 March 2018 – 28 February 2022

Implementing Agency

Insert Implementing Agency's name and abbreviation (where available).

International Trade Centre (ITC)

Partners

This refers to key institutions (national, regional and/or international) co-implementing the project or having been formally recognized to play a key role in its implementation.

UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, co-implementing partner)

Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT)

Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)

Committee for Food Security (CFS)

Ministry of Health and Social Protection (MHSPP)

Agency on Standardization, Metrology, Certification and Trade Inspection of Government of Tajikistan (Tajikistandard)

Dehkan Farm Association of the Apricot Growers of Asht District (DFAAGAD)

National Association of Small and Medium Business

Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tajikistan (CCI)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------------|--|
| A2F | Access to finance |
| BSA | Baseline Assessment |
| CA | Competent Authorities |
| CAC | Codex Alimentarius Commission |
| CFS | Committee for Food Security |
| CIIE | China International Import Expo |
| DDR | Districts of the Direct Regulation |
| DTIS | Diagnostic Trade Integration Study |
| EBRD | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development |
| EIF | Enhanced Integrated Framework |
| EQM | Export Quality Management |
| EU | European Union |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| FC | Focus Group |
| GAP | Good Agricultural Practices |
| GHP | Good Hygiene Practices |
| GIZ | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| HACCP | Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point System |
| HPHT | Harvest and Postharvest Technology |
| IEC | Information, Education and Communication |
| IPM | Integrated Pest Management |
| IPPC | International Plant Protection Convention |
| ITC | International Trade Centre |
| LoP | List of Participants |
| MEDT | Ministry of Economic Development and Trade |
| MHSPP | Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population |
| MOA | Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan |
| MSDSP | Mountain Societies Development Support Programme |
| MRL | Maximum Residue Limit |
| MT | Master Trainers |
| NFSS | National Food Safety Strategy |
| NRMP | National Residue Monitoring Plan |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| OIE | World Organisation for Animal Health |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| PPG | Project Preparation Grant |
| PSC | Project Steering Committee |
| SOPPAC | State Organization for Plant Protection and Agriculture Chemicalization |
| SPS | Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures |
| STDF | Standards and Trade Development Facility |
| ISO | International Organization for Standardization |
| SME | Small and Medium sized Enterprise |
| ST | Study Tour |
| Tajikstandart | Agency on Standardization, Certification, Metrology and Trade Inspection |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNIDO | United Nations Industrial Development Organization |
| VMP | Veterinary Medicinal Products |
| WB | World Bank |
| WHO | World Health Organization |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the favourable climatic conditions for production and the number of capacity building projects implemented in the country, the agricultural sector of Tajikistan still faces market access barriers related to food safety issues and the lack of compliance with international SPS standards. Whilst the basic legal framework for technical and sanitary standards is in place, due to lack of funds, capacity, and organization, Tajikistan's agricultural products are often not in compliance with international standards. Small and medium-sized agribusiness enterprises (SMEs) have difficulties in gaining international certification due to multiple factors, among the main ones – lack of harmonization with international food safety criteria, including on residues of agrochemicals and pharmacologically active substances (veterinary medicines), as well as gaps in the Tajik official food controls with international procedures and practices, including official control and monitoring of residues in food.

In this context, the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) approved a project proposal in October 2017 to help improve the export competitiveness of Tajik Small and Medium-Sized enterprises and food safety through better use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines with a focus on apricots and honey sector.

The project was conducted from March 2018 until February 2022 and had a budget of US\$ 1,157,751 of which US\$ 890,676 were direct STDF funding. ITC was the main implementing organization and responsible for the management of the project. Selected project activities were sub-contracted to FAO under a UN-to-UN agreement.

The goal of the project was to **improve export competitiveness of Tajik SMEs** and food safety through better use of **agri-chemicals** and **veterinary medicines** with focus on **honey** and **apricot** sectors. This was achieved through four Outputs which included the (1) strengthening of the regulatory and control system for use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines; (2) the safe usage of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines; (3) a component on access to finance and; (4) some activities to build business linkages for the selected value chains. The assistance was delivered by focussing on two value chains, namely the honey and dried apricot sectors. Both products are of high interest for exports from Tajikistan.

The project aimed to remove technical and market infrastructure barriers for small scale producers and processors and assisted them to develop new skills and gain experience in SPS related standard requirements. In addition to that, the project aimed to introduce sustainable agri-chemical use to have a positive impact on the environment and contribute to the related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The beneficiaries of the project were from public and private sectors. In total, the project sensitized and trained more than 500 stakeholders of the public (144) and private sectors (415) on the need to comply with SPS measures and more specifically on the usage of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines for international trade.

The project worked with government officials at national level as well as from pilot regions, namely from Sughd, Khatlon, and Districts of the Direct Regulation (DDR). They were trained on the risk-based food control and monitoring system and developed a viable concept of a

modern food control and monitoring system for Tajikistan. Regarding the private sector support, the project developed a pool of more than 30 local trainers and food safety advisers from associations, support institutions and as well as honey and apricot sector enterprises who cascaded the training programs to final beneficiaries, such as beekeepers and apricot farmers and processors to comply with the regulatory framework. The training content to final beneficiaries was related to “Good hygiene, beekeeping, agriculture practices and sanitary and phytosanitary requirements in the honey and apricot production”. Even after the project ended, the trainers organized themselves independently of the project and continue offering their services in the context of other projects or private initiatives. The farmers and processors were also assisted to develop residue self-monitoring systems and cooperated with the Committee for Food Security (CFS) to increase transparency and good practices in the use of veterinary medicines.

In addition, the project contributed to the harmonization and adoption of international standards, in particular related to Maximum Residue Levels (MRL) through consultation and advice for the drafting of MRL standards based on regional/international standards and discussed the route for adoption by the CFS.

Two of the main problems affecting the honey and apricot value chain stakeholders, namely access to finance and building market linkages were addressed by the project under separate Outputs. Selected honey and apricot producers were linked with international and local buyers and were trained on how to access external financial resources to fund SPS related operations that will be required by buyers.

While most of the attended results were achieved and the project was successful in improving the export competitiveness of Tajik SMEs through better use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines, there were also significant challenges which meant that not all the targets could be fully achieved.

Besides the restrictions caused by the Covid pandemic, the newly created CFS as the leading authority for food safety and other SPS related functions had some operational issues during the duration of the project. Responsibilities and work relations with the project team, other Tajik public authorities and the private sector were not fully defined, and the institutional budget did not allow to fully exercise its mandate. This became clear e.g. during the support to draft the legal documents, the National Residue Monitoring Plan, the support for food testing laboratory analysis and the regional activities in the country’s apricot and honey producing regions.

Taking stock of the project’s success and building on the technical support provided by the project, no cases of border rejections for the targeted products were registered within the last two years of the project implementation. Although, the Covid-19 related restrictions led to a downsized number of exports and shipment of goods, the positive impact of the project can be attributed to the overall number of laboratory tests for food commodities in the domestic markets that was raised considerably during the implementation period. As a result, rejections of the food commodities in the domestic markets decreased. These changes in practice related to food control and monitoring can be seen as a result of raised

vigilance and attention of the food control bodies such as CFS and hence as an effect of the sensitization and project training activities.

2 BACKGROUND

The Republic of Tajikistan joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) on 2 March 2013 following 11 intense years of preparation. The pre-accession activities included various changes in the trade-related policy, regulatory and institutional arrangements based on significant gaps in the sanitary and phytosanitary system that were revealed during the accession process. In particular, the food safety system which is largely bogged and does not comply with international best practice prohibits Tajikistan's access to high-value markets. Several analytical studies of the food control system carried out before project preparation and implementation identified problems in the agricultural sector related to the application of agri-chemicals, the quality and application of veterinary medicines in the Tajik animal food production as well as the extensive use of food additives beyond permitted levels. This has caused food safety issues on various products within the sector. Inadequate capacity of the food control system, absence of the residue monitoring system, weak capacity and competence of the laboratory network, a lack of an efficient regulatory framework, insufficiency of standards and maximum residue levels for the food contaminants continue to pose challenges and risks of consumers health and opportunity to diversify or/and extend export markets.

Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SME) disproportionally face challenges in gaining international certification, meeting regulatory requirements and/or market standards, and in accessing finance which all prevent formalization, growth, and diversification of export markets for agri-products produced in Tajikistan.

The challenge of data availability regarding residues of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines in food and feed products results in limited information on the usage, quality, and safety of the pesticides and veterinary medicines and a weak monitoring system overall. For the rudimentary system that is in place, testing capacities in laboratories are inadequate, which exacerbates the challenges in controlling and improving the system. All these problems hamper the elimination of food safety risks in various commodities for exports which resulted in rejects of agricultural products in various export markets, financial losses for businesses and unrealized export potential accordingly.

Several assessments on the food safety system in Tajikistan were carried out by several international organizations, including FAO, ITC, OSCE, WB, and WHO. Based on the research of various partners, ITC supported the establishment of an inter-ministry working group that developed the National Food Safety Strategy (NFSS).

In this context, the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan (MEDT) as a coordinator of all pre and post WTO accession activities applied 2015/2016 for an STDF PPG, to further assist the country in developing a project proposal based on the draft National Food Safety Strategy. The research around the strategy underlined avenues how to enable market access for Tajik agricultural products through improved food safety systems to correspond to some of the most significant needs of the sector. The Standards and Trade

Development Facility approved the project proposal in October 2017. The project was initially planned to be carried out from 01 March 2018 until 28 February 2021 (three years) but was extended by one year until 28 February 2022. The main reason for the extension was a delay of the implementation of activities caused by the Covid pandemic that created a lot of challenges in the attainment of objectives and expected results.

The project proposal was based on the needs and gaps identified and prioritized in two key strategic documents. The first was the NFSS, and the second document was the Road Map on improvement of veterinary, sanitary and phytosanitary safety in Tajikistan. The Road Map concluded that the country was facing a need to establish an "Operational Food Contaminant and Residue Monitoring System" and the NFSS – to strengthen good practices in SPS-related technical cooperation within the fruits and vegetables sector. The establishment of such a system allows effective and efficient food control mechanism with adequate food safety and open further export opportunities.

The approach of the project proposal embodied the principle of replicating the positive experiences of multiple pilot projects undertaken in Tajikistan, in the area of value chain development and it incorporated the regional and international best practices on sustainable and effective use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines leading to improved quality and safety of the produce.

The project focused on the apricot and honey value chains and incorporated regional and international best practices on sustainable and effective use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines leading to improved quality and safety of the two products. MEDT and MoA of Tajikistan requested to give priority to these products as they were assessed as agricultural products with high export capacity.

3 PROJECT GOAL

The goal of the project was to improve export competitiveness of Tajik SMEs and food safety through better use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines with focus on honey and apricot sectors. It was intended to enhance high value market access for Tajik agri-food producers and processors and increase the level of safety of Tajik domestic food by reducing the risk of contamination and improving the systems of control and monitoring of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines. The impact is a contribution to a strengthened sustainable agriculture, responsible consumption, and production.

In order to meet the needs of the country in diversification of export market access through an improved food safety system, the project was designed to enhance the weak regulatory and control system on the usage of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines. In addition, it aimed at providing substantive training on standards and dosage of agri-chemicals set by international standard setting bodies such as Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), and other countries to increase products compliance with requirements of high value markets.

Further, private sector support was provided to increase capacities and knowledge about best practices in VMP and agri-chemical appliance. The private sector was also assisted to

create market linkages for domestic and export-oriented trade as well as to identify possible routes how to access finance for SPS compliance.

4 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT

ITC was the main implementing agency responsible for overall management and coordination of the project activities. A few selected project activities under Output 1 were implemented in collaboration with FAO as a co-implementing agency and key national ministries and agencies such as, the Committee for Food Security (CFS), the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agency on Standardization, Metrology, Certification and Trade Inspection (Tajikstandard) as well as selected national and regional private sector associations facilitated the implementation of the project in Tajikistan.

A UN-to-UN Agreement between FAO and ITC over an amount of US\$ 196,568 was signed in October 2018. The budget was transferred to FAO in two tranches upon request by the recipient. The first tranche over US\$ 132,832 was transferred in November 2018 which ensured coordinated implementation of the activities related to output 1. A second tranche over US\$ 64,736 was transferred to FAO in January 2021.

Activities 1.2-1.6 below were under FAO responsibility.

1.2. "Support in designing and drafting the regulatory and control system for use and traceability of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines";

1.3." Support in advocating for adoption of the proposed regulatory and control system";

1.4. "Design operational risk-based residue monitoring system for agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines";

1.5. "Sensitise and train officials of the regulatory body on the risk-based monitoring system" and

1.6. "Harmonize and adopt agri-chemical and veterinary medicine MRLs with international standards (SPS Measures) and key export market requirements"

To enable smooth coordination and transparency in the implementation and management of the project, a project steering committee (PSC) was established. The PSC was composed of all relevant project stakeholders and provided direction for implementation of the project activities, namely:

- The Ministry of Economic Development and Trade
- Ministry of Agriculture (The State Organization for Plant Protection and Agriculture Chemicalization – SOPPAC)
- Committee for Food Security (CFS)
- Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan (State Sanitary and Epidemiological Surveillance Department– SSES)
- Agency on Standardization, Metrology, Certification and Trade Inspection of Government of Tajikistan- (Tajikstandard)
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Tajikistan
- Committee on Environmental Protection under the Government of Tajikistan (Committee on Chemical Safety)
- Dehkan Farm Association of the Apricot Growers of Asht District of Tajikistan

- Public organization, association “Intermed”
- Association of beekeepers of Sangvor and Garm districts, Sughd and Khatlon regions
- ITC as Implementing Agency and National Management Team
- FAO (national or regional presence as deemed necessary by FAO)

The roles and responsibilities of the PSC focused on:

- Overseeing, planning, implementation and reporting of project progress (on strategic level)
- Facilitation of the coordination, collaboration, and communication among all stakeholders
- Information sharing and collaboration

In total 4 regular PSC meetings were carried out within the project cycle. However, only the inaugural meeting could be held on-site (face to face) in May 2019 after slightly more than one year of the project implementation. All subsequent meetings had to be conducted online due to travel and meeting restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In addition to the overall project steering committee, a Task Force to work on EU market access for Tajik honey was created. The members of the Task Force were mostly the same as for the Project Steering Committee except for private sector representatives who were not included in the Task Force. The Task Force convened at least once every month during the second, third and fourth year of project implementation and was instrumental in submitting the National Residue Monitoring Plan (NRMP), (see activity 1.8 below).

During the inception phase, a joint mission of ITC and FAO experts was conducted. The mission focused on finetuning project activities and setting the foundations for the subsequent baseline assessment. The mission included a review and evaluation of the current situation on the usage of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicinal products (VMPs), import-export procedures and volumes, regulatory framework, and controls/inspection by authorized bodies as well as safety and quality control throughout the value chain of the target products (apricots and honey). The mission reports were discussed and validated during workshops and the results were laid out as a baseline to explore possible project activities. The project baseline assessment enabled a better understanding of the situation in Tajikistan with regard to the project focus.

Local staff of both agencies (ITC and FAO) regularly monitored project activities through direct participation and discussion of the implementation progress during PSC meetings, monitoring of in-kind contribution by project partners, monitoring of performance indicators as per the project logical framework and reflection of the results in the STDF 6 months progress reports.

The learning and knowledge increase from training and coaching sessions were evaluated through customized training evaluation forms at the end of each training session and follow-up discussions with trained participants and project stakeholders were held throughout the implementation of the project whenever feasible. At the end of workshops and project events, recommendations on planning of next steps were discussed. These recommendations were included in follow-up activities. For instance, the first version of the

NRMP application had significant gaps and needed to be improved before submission to the responsible unit at the EU Commission. Project activities were regularly assessed vis-à-vis project indicators and objectives, and progress was reported in regular reporting.

5 PROJECT OBJECTIVE, OUTPUTS AND ACTIVITIES

5.1 Project objective

The immediate objective of the project was to improve food safety and export competitiveness of Tajik SMEs through better use of agri-chemical and veterinary medicines.

The project's outcome was to enhance high value market access for Tajik agri-food producers and processors as well as to increase the level of safety of Tajik domestic food. The impact is a contribution to a strengthened sustainable agriculture, responsible and safe consumption, and production. The attainment of the objectives and impact of the project was planned to be achieved through four main outputs:

Output 1: Regulatory and control system for use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines established and operational

The project achieved or approached very closely to achieving all results within Output 1, and the competent authority of Tajikistan – the Committee for Food Security (CFS) has significantly increased its capacity to perform official control of honey and apricots in line with international requirements. During project discussions at the side of a project event, CFS expressed that the project chose a realistic and well-grounded approach to the legal drafting, taking into account existing laws and regulations and building it into the existing framework. The same was said about the project's training and coaching activities. It was emphasized that the training sessions were well carried out and meeting the demand of the country to perform the control. Operational activities were implemented according to the work plan based on a solid and in-depth baseline study. In general, criteria required to receive approval for export of honey to the EU have been addressed. Most elements of regulatory and control system for use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines are developed; at the same time, making them fully operational to a large extent will depend on the national beneficiaries and the private sector, and on the availability of further support of the Government of Tajikistan. Overall, the following key results are achieved:

- A comprehensive baseline study that includes information and analyses specific data on the national system of agri-chemicals and veterinary drugs and more specifically data on import, distribution, storage, use, sales, and controls as well as the monitoring systems, reference to national and international standards as well as market access requirements. It also includes data on the supply side, results of laboratory tests and provided a project baseline for the development of indicators
- Accurate database on agri-chemical and veterinary medicines developed and made available to the control bodies – includes all nationally registered veterinary medicinal products and agri-chemicals, imports, substances in actual use by producers, national and international regulatory levels

- A new model of official control and monitoring developed, agreed upon with the CFS and accepted; the model is supported by a written toolkit document “Consolidated Tool on the National Regulatory, Control and Monitoring System for Tajikistan: Honey, Apricots and Beyond”
- 2 procedures on agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines developed – incorporated into draft regulatory acts on (a) the rules for application of pesticides to prevent bee poisoning, and (b) on the use of veterinary medicines to treat bee diseases
- 60 national specialists on the national regulatory and control system were sensitized on modern food safety control and monitoring measures at 1 in-person and 21 online workshops. This group is different from the Food Safety Advisers developed under Output 2 (further below).
- 4 key legal instruments in the honey sector drafted (3 new draft legal acts, amendments to 1 existing legal act updated), discussed and agreed upon with the CFS, including on various aspects of beekeeping; the drafts acts are moving through the approval process within the CFS and outside CFS at the competent government stakeholders
- 11 new MRLs of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines in honey elaborated, formalized and proposed for approval. The CFS expressed their commitment to follow up beyond the end date of the project and wants to ensure its approval
- Risk-based National Residue Monitoring Plans (NRMP) for both honey and apricots developed jointly with the CFS, and available for use
- CFS is equipped with sampling instrumentation to collect honey samples for the purposes of the NRMP
- Sampling methodologies and procedures developed, and the CFS inspectors are trained to use them
- CFS specialists of inspection offices and laboratories at the regional and local levels were trained at 6 workshops (at regional level a total of 121 persons, including 26 women) to conduct risk-based inspections, monitoring, sampling, and other measures of official control. According to the training evaluations, CFS employees learned a lot of practical information very relevant and applicable to their work
- National officials participated in 1 Codex meeting (online)
- A package of awareness and training materials (including a set of trainer slides and handouts tested during the regional training, as well as a multi-purpose guide (English and Tajik languages) on advice for the honey and apricot producers on several compliance aspects), to continue capacity building and outreach after the end of the project
- A laboratory assessment was completed in Tajikistan that included all domestic food related testing laboratories, its capacities, and opportunities. A plan for the enrolment of the laboratory rationalization strategy was developed
- 2 workshops on laboratory monitoring of agri-chemicals and veterinary drug residues were conducted
- An interdisciplinary Task Force (TF) was established to develop the National Residue Monitoring Plan (NRMP), a mandatory requirement for exporting honey to the EU. The TF was composed of representatives of the Competent Authorities (CAs) which developed a road map for accessing the EU market

- 25 Tajik government officials were trained by an EU expert on the EU regulatory requirements for honey import
- An application to access the EU market for honey was submitted by Tajikistan in 2021 and 2022. Although Tajikistan was ultimately not approved for EU honey imports, the country's competent authorities were extensively trained on the requirements for accessing the EU market
- The project supported the Tajik government to send 104 honey samples to a designated accredited laboratory for testing in Germany which is a requirement of the NRMP. The results of the analysis indicated significant improvements compared to the testing results obtained at the beginning of the project that formed part of the baseline study (see first bullet point). All noncompliant results were investigated by Tajik authorities with the assistance of project experts.

Output 2: Strengthened capacity of the project beneficiaries on the safe usage of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines

The project achieved its most tangible and effective results under Output 2. A large number of private sector stakeholders, including the largest group of main beneficiaries of the project, namely apricot farmers and beekeepers acquired new knowledge and techniques in better usage of agri-chemicals and veterinary drug application. Overall, the following key results were achieved:

- 330 stakeholders (apricot farmers and beekeepers out of which 31 are female) have been trained and improved their understanding of SPS and international trade through workshops and training sessions on export quality requirements, results of laboratory tests and what they mean for Tajikistan apricot and honey producers as well as workshops on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Good Hygienic Practices (GHP), Harvest and Post-Harvest Technologies (HPHT), EU SPS requirements and Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- A group of 32 Master Trainers was trained in food safety practices and systems related to Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Good Hygienic Practices (GHP), Harvest and Post-harvest Technologies (HPHT), EU SPS requirements and Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
- A sub-group of the Master Trainers (17) were further coached on training and learning skills to successfully cascade the training content to final beneficiaries
- 11 of the Master trainers were trained on Self-Monitoring Systems and how to apply in the honey and apricot sector businesses in Tajikistan
- The Master Trainers cascaded trainings to final beneficiaries on “Good hygiene, beekeeping, agriculture practices and sanitary and phytosanitary requirements in the honey production”, organized themselves independently of the project and continue offering their services in the context of other projects or private initiatives
- A total of 15 field sessions on food safety practices with an average of 20 participants (beekeepers and apricot farmers) were implemented
- An information, education, and communication plan with the main objective to sensitize and create awareness via media coverage related to agri-chemicals and veterinary drugs usage in honey and apricot processing sector of Tajikistan was developed. The plan suggests general recommendations for the sector stakeholders

in addressing existing challenges through information dissemination, and to offer initial steps in planning and launching a media campaign

- The plan raised the awareness of the target audience, such as apricot and honey processors and producers, on the correct use of agrichemicals and veterinary medicines, it strengthened knowledge of government officials on the importance of enhancing and modernizing the food safety system, including the legal basis to ensure access of agri-products to high value markets and sensitized the general audience (population/consumers) on importance of consuming safe food and their participation in improving safety of food in domestic markets
- Short video clips on agri-chemical usage and application of veterinary medicines for apricot and honey sectors were developed and aired in local TV channels (public TV channel Safina as most popular TV channel in Tajikistan)
- The most popular radio channels in Tajikistan (Sadoi Dushanbe and Imruz) presented radio shows on dried apricot and honey food safety practices developed by the project
- Three newspaper articles about honey and apricot entitled “Export of Tajik apricots to European markets, opportunities and challenges” and “Tajik honey: There is the Need, but exports are low” were published in Tajik and Russian languages. Both articles were published in the commercial newspapers “Asia Plus” in Russian and in the socio-political and business newspaper “Jumhuriyat” and the commercial newspaper “SSSR” published both articles about honey and apricot in Tajik. In addition, the National Information Agency “Khozar” published both articles in Tajik in the economic block on its website
- Two booklets (one on honey and one on apricot) as well as several smaller brochures on selected topics were also printed

Output 3: Access to finance enhanced for SMEs in compliance with SPS measures

The project achieved few results under Output 3. The main reason for the underperformance was a shift of focus, away from financing procurements related to meeting SPS requirements for exports to the bare survival of enterprises as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the low budget allocated to Output 3 was not sufficient to achieve most of the targeted results. Thirdly, a reluctance of potential financing institutions to provide required financial support to project partner businesses was observed which can again be attributed to the uncertainty around the pandemic and its overall effects on the Tajik economy. Nevertheless, the following results were achieved:

- The project collected data on beneficiaries needs regarding access to finance as baseline for the planned activities under Output 3 in September – October 2019
- The baseline data was revised by taking into account initial effects of the Covid-pandemic in 2020
- 52 honey and apricot businesses were interviewed in Sughd, Khatlon, and DDR/Rasht valley regions of Tajikistan during the period July–August 2020 to better understand the effects of the Corona pandemic on the business operations and its corresponding need for external financing. During these surveys the shift of interest away from investing financial resources in SPS export compliance was observed.

- Another assessment of the available finance institutions and service providers identified key national and international finance stakeholders active in the agribusiness sector, the institutions were contacted and linkages were established between two financial institutions and 5 Tajik enterprises.
- Regional focus groups (FGs) were founded to identify enterprise preferences for ITC assistance during the project. This was done with involvement of partners such as beekeepers and apricot producers from the districts of the direct regulation, Sughd and Khatlon regions. The outcomes of the FG meetings established a base for further discussion and addressing SMEs needs in the planned workshops in Dushanbe and Sugd region. The meetings took place in January and February 2021.
- Two workshops on “Financing quality improvements and growth of agri-business” took place in Dushanbe and in Sughd region. The workshops involved 82 project beneficiaries (large and medium size beekeepers, apricot processors and producers including) and 8 finance institutions and service providers. The workshops enabled direct meetings with some finance institution to obtain information about their conditions for getting financial support, however, the outcomes of the workshops were not further followed-up as the project ended soon after the workshops were implemented. It is not clear whether local institutions and project beneficiaries followed up after the project had ended.
- A comprehensive guide customized for Tajik enterprises in the agri-food sector was prepared on access to finance.

Output 4: Increased linkages along the sector value chain and export markets

The project achieved most results under Output 4. However, the implementation of some of the activities were also affected by the Corona virus outbreak which caused significant delays and obstacles. Tajik value chain stakeholders were introduced to technical market requirements of their targeted export destinations, linked to 7 buyers (domestic and international) as well as exposed to best practices and well-established honey value chains in Ukraine, Europe's major honey supplying country. Furthermore, the work under Output 4 contributed to strengthened public-private stakeholder relations and a more effective exchange and work relationship between the government and private stakeholders of the honey and apricot sectors. Overall, the following key results were achieved:

- 5 stakeholder meetings/workshops with a total of 34 participants (65 % public and 35% private stakeholders) were organized to bring together key private and public bodies active in pesticide and veterinary drugs export, use and control to debate current and (from 2020) Covid-19 related challenges that may have negative impacts on exports of the agricultural products and to develop a coordinated approach for addressing identified challenges. The workshops were focused on control, import and application of pesticides and veterinary drugs and monitoring of their residues and particularly on approval of the “List of authorized chemical and biological products of the Republic of Tajikistan”
- 30 SMEs from the apricot and honey sectors including the Association of beekeepers of Sughd region and International Association of Exporters and Producers of Tajikistan participated in online marketing meetings and provided presentations about their profiles and supplies. The information shared by presenters was further

analysed and translated into a more structured and targeted approach to access and attract potential buyers in the EU and other markets

- Two workshops on Export Quality Management and on identification of potential buyers were conducted to coach a group of 50 honey and apricot businesses on technical export requirements, mainly related to SPS and TBT. Potential buyers were invited to attend the meetings and report directly to SMEs regarding their product requirements. A linkage with the hotel management (where the trainings took place as well as with an international buyer, the Italian company Noberasco was established). Following the workshop, the hotel management assessed some of the participating honey processors for the supply of honey and procured samples.
- Noberasco (a leading buyer of dried fruits in Europe) expressed interest in undertaking a field visit to Tajikistan in summer of 2020 but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the visit had to be postponed and further cancelled. Following the lift of restrictions, the company was contacted after the end of the project and expressed interest to visit Tajikistan in 2023 and engage with apricot producers supported by the project.
- 6 field visits to the project target areas (Sughd, Khatlon regions and Rasht valley) were undertaken to collect information and update business profiles of the potential producers and exporters of the target products. Factsheets of honey and apricot producers were drafted, shared with the companies for review and finalized. In total 27 company fact sheets were prepared (15 companies active in the apricot sector and 12 in the honey sector). The operations of the companies were subsequently monitored, and factsheets updated if necessary.
- A study tour to Ukraine was conducted in October 2021. Ukraine was deemed the most suitable location for the study tour and could be accessed despite Covid-19 related travel restrictions. Ukraine is also one of the largest honey producers in the world and produces honey applying international best practices. A group of 12 beneficiaries from the public and private sectors was selected to participate in the study tour. The program included visits and meetings with beekeepers, associations, honey processors and exporters and competent authorities to familiarize participants with good beekeeping practices, honey processing, and export to EU states as well as establishing business and professional linkages. The ITC office in Ukraine was involved to facilitate and coordinate administrative and logistic arrangements. Cooperations on business promotion were established.

With reference to project success indicators, the following achievements can be categorized as the indirect project outcomes/results:

1. The number of official food related health incidences decreased within the period of project implementation. However, a direct link with project activities is difficult to establish and proof. Only two health incidents caused by residues such as agrochemicals and veterinary drugs were registered within the reporting period vs. four in the years prior to the project implementation. The two cases of the poisoning due to consumption of the directly contaminated food by organochloride chemicals in two families were registered which were categorized as the acute poisoning¹. Rejections of the food commodities in the domestic markets decreased. These

¹ Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Population

changes in practice related to food control and monitoring can be seen as a result of raised vigilance and attention of the food control bodies such as CFS and hence as an effect of the sensitization and project training activities.

2. Officially, no cases of border rejections for the target products were registered within the last two years of the project implementation. However, the Covid-19 related restrictions led to an overall downsized number of exports and shipment of goods. On a more positive note, the overall number of laboratory tests for food commodities in the domestic markets was raised considerably and rejection of the food commodities in the domestic market decreased. This development can be regarded as a result of raised vigilance and attention of the food control bodies such as CFS and as an effect of the sensitization and project training activities. For instance, the number of laboratory tests in green markets (bazars) in 2021 increased by 60890 tests compared to the reference year to 2019. The number includes all kinds of product testing as it is not possible to obtain more segregated data per product group. The number of total tests increased by approx. 23% compared to 2019. The number of withdrawn/rejected honey decreased. For instance, the absolute number of withdrawn honey decreased by 35kg (compared to 2019. The absolute number in 2019 = 1700kg, 2021 = 1665kg). This is a decrease of approx. 2%. Similar results were reported by SMES in the fresh and dried fruit and vegetable sectors². The volume of the exported honey increased considerably within the project period between 2018 (17 tons) to 2021 (28 tons) with a covid related interruption of honey exports during the years between the beginning and end of the project duration³. The export destinations were mostly Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia and Russia and not Europe.
3. An assessment and interviews with apricot related companies indicated improvements in competitiveness and B2B linkages. For instance, significant improvements were reported by company LLC K and K with a relative increase of up to 20% in business linkages mostly related to regional markets. However, most other interviewed SMEs did not confirm improvements and indicated COVID-19 related restrictions as main reason for the minor or no improvements. In addition to the Covid restrictions.

Specific and detailed sub-achievements are reflected in the section 5.1.1.

5.1.1 Output 1: Regulatory and control system for use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines established and operational

The focus of Output 1 activities was to understand the main problems in SPS related export restrictions and domestic food concerns in order to establish and operationalize a regulatory and control system for the use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines. The main beneficiary of the project was the Committee for Food Security of the Republic of Tajikistan (CFS) which was established as a result of transformation of the State Veterinary

² CFS comparative report for 2019-2021

³ ITC trademap: <https://www.trademap.org/>

Inspection Service (SVIS); other beneficiaries included the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of Population of Republic of Tajikistan, and the Agency on Standardization, Metrology, Certification and Trade Inspection of Government of Tajikistan- "Tajikistandard". The project also actively involved other public bodies and non-government stakeholders, including the Committee on Environmental Protection under the Tajik government, the Commission on Plant Protection and Chemicalization of Agriculture, State Unitary Enterprise "Honey of Tajikistan" (unites more than a thousand small honey producers), "Niholparvar", "ANCOT", and the NGO "Association Intermyod").

⁴The implementation of the Output 1 commenced with a baseline study which covered the two focus value chains of the agri-food products, namely dried apricots and honey. The study along with information obtained during the design phase of the project established a basis for tailored implementation of the project activities. It also enabled the project to collect accurate and specific data on the imports, distribution, storage, sale, and usage of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines (traceability). Further, it revealed specific challenges in the usage of the agri-chemicals and veterinary medicinal products (VMP) which were analysed to customize the technical approach of the project. Results of the tests indicated compliance with pesticides MRL in EU but



excessive amounts of certain veterinary medicines in honey samples that are either limited by Maximum Residue Levels or banned (for instance Chloramphenicol or Nitrofurans) in Tajikistan and the European Union. For dried apricots the most important concern regarding food safety was the high amount of Sulphur dioxide that was beyond permitted levels in some samples. The results were presented, validated and communicated with key national and international stakeholders to ensure complementary and effective implementation of project activities.

During the inception phase, information about key project beneficiaries such as SMEs from both apricot and honey sectors was collected and fact sheets developed with indication of volumes, quality characteristics, and available certificates. In addition, 28 honey and 24 dried apricot samples were sent to Germany and tested by an accredited laboratory. The laboratory analyses were helpful to identify the magnitude of agri-chemical and VMP residues. This was particularly important as during the project design phase the information on quantitative data and amounts of residues were largely lacking. Test outcomes showed extensive use of Sulphur dioxide (SO₂) in processed dried apricots and antimicrobials in honey production. The baseline study also revealed a number of gaps and the need to establish a database for agri-chemical and veterinary medicines imports, production, movements and usage. The baseline study results, and the control and regulatory

⁴ Photo: Meeting with government representatives to discuss baseline study under Output 1

procedures of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines were presented to competent authorities and outcomes were discussed and validated during a workshop.

⁵The baseline formed the foundation for all activities related to the development of a viable concept of a modern food control and monitoring system for Tajikistan, with a focus on residues of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines, as well as a range of tools and practical “how-to” guides for national competent authorities and the private sector, and support to the development of the national residues monitoring plan to enable export of honey to the EU.



To continue advocating for, sensitising and training officials of the competent authority (CFS) on the risk-based control and monitoring system, the work with the CFS included more than 20 face-to-face and/or virtual meetings. The trainings were attended by officials from the CFS and other authorities responsible for control of food and of agri-chemicals. The sessions were focused on the recommended elements of the national regulatory, control and monitoring system, which also were addressed in a consolidated tool. The Consolidated Tool on the National Regulatory, Control and Monitoring System for Tajikistan: Honey, Apricots and Beyond is a practical instrument and a handbook on how to implement the recommended system in practice, given the current regulatory framework and suggested recommendations. Each section of the Tool includes the following information: a) discussion of a specific element of the national system – this sub-section explains the element and its role in the official control and monitoring, analyses the gaps in the current Tajik system and outlines international requirements and best practices; b) steps to be taken and changes to be made by the competent authorities – a set of recommendations for immediate action to close the existing gaps with regard to the specific element of food control/monitoring; c) practical tools enabling the CFS/other competent authorities to take the recommended steps into practice – forms, templates, matrixes, algorithms, consolidated MRLs, questionnaires, etc. The project carried out several meetings with the CFS to discuss the tool, get the feedback and finalize it. The tool is designed as a handbook for the CFS, as well as a training/capacity building tool for the time after the project to ensure sustainability. In October/November 2021, the Tool was used as the basis for training at 6 regional trainings for the CFS officials held by FAO to develop their new skills.

Several web sessions were dedicated to joint work with the main beneficiaries for commenting and feedback on specific technical areas, such as MRLs of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines, risk-based planning and residue monitoring, sampling, legal drafting, etc. Overall, during all events, 60 stakeholders were sensitised and trained, including government authorities responsible for the control of food (CFS, Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the RT, Ministry of Agriculture, Tajikstandard Agency) and agri-chemicals (Committee on Environmental Protection under the Government of RT, Plant protection and chemicalization of agriculture), as well as from the private sector (State Unitary Enterprise “Honey of Tajikistan”, "Niholparvar", "ANCOT", "NGO Association

⁵ Photo: discussion with beekeepers on results of the laboratory tests of honey samples

Intermyod"). An important element in building an operational food control and monitoring system is its solid legal framework. The project assessed the existing legal framework in the honey and apricot sectors and identified the need to close certain regulatory gaps within the honey sector as one of the priorities. Specifically, it was found that several important pieces of secondary regulations that should establish certain requirements and procedures were missing. In close consultation with the CFS, the following legal instruments were drafted:

1. Veterinary and Sanitary Requirements for facilities engaged in production of beekeeping products;
2. Instruction for the prevention of poisoning of, and the establishment of the fact of poisoning of honeybees with plant protection products
3. Instruction for the Prevention and Elimination of Bee Diseases;
4. Amendments to the Veterinary Requirements for Goods Subject to Veterinary and Sanitary Control (Supervision)

All drafts are within the mandate of the CFS and can be adopted by the CFS; they were discussed in details with the CFS, including its legal department, and a clear procedure for adoption has been agreed on. The adoption process was not finalised after the end of the project. CFS officials expressed strong commitment to follow up with the adoption.

Under Output 1 the project also supported the designing of an operational risk-based residue monitoring plan. While residue monitoring plans for plant-based food is not a requirement for export to the EU, it is an important tool to ensure domestic food safety and reduce export risks to various export markets. Appropriate sampling procedures are critical to ensure validity of monitoring results, while absence of uniform sampling rules and principles in Tajikistan was identified as one of the critical gaps impeding implementation of a sound monitoring system. To address this gap, the project developed a National Sampling Guidance in line with Codex principles and requirements.

Although it is not mandatory to develop an NRMP for plant-based imports to the EU, it is a mandatory requirement for animal-based products, such as honey. The project supported Tajikistan to develop its very first NRMP for honey. In order to do so a national Task Force consisting of all relevant ministries and other public actors was formed and a series of laboratory tests for honey samples conducted. In addition, the project provided the CFS with the sampling equipment. The project procured honey sampling equipment for the CFS at the cost of US\$ 15,000. Specifically, the following was procured: 1. Conical probe with a length of at least 500 mm, 30 pcs; 2. Plastic containers suitable for food disposable with capacity 200ml, 208 pcs; 3. Stainless steel spatula 1dm³ (needs to be food grade), 30 pcs; 4. Plastic or glass containers for food disposable with capacity 500ml, 110 pcs; 5. Piece of mesh with square holes of 0.5 mm or gauze, 60 pcs; 6. Surgical gloves, 500 pairs; 7. Lab bags for transportation of samples, 30 pcs; 8. Labels (for samples), 300 pcs; 9. Permanent markers, 30 pcs. The project supported the analyses of 104 honey samples for EU honey market access. The samples were shipped to an accredited laboratory in Germany. The NRMP was submitted on 31.03.2021 for the harvesting season of 2020-2021.

The Tajik CA, namely CFS received a response from EU SANTE (responsible DG for the NRMP approval) with requests for amendments to the National Residue Monitoring Plan but either

did not respond (to initial requests) or responded too late⁶. CFS confirmed receipt of the second official letter submitted by SANTE after a formal request from ITC about the status of the EU honey market access application. Prior to the ITC request (at the time of reception of formal communication from the EU to CFS, ITC was not informed about the comments and request for amendments.

ITC held a meeting with EU DG SANTE and was informed that Tajikistan can address the comments in the NRMP for honey of the harvesting season 2021-2022 and submit to EU by the end of March 2022 and thus remain on the list of country applicants. ITC submitted an official letter to CFS after the end of the project duration (through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to clarify the state of the development of the NRMP for honey for the harvesting season of 2021-2022 but no response was received. Until the drafting of this report, ITC did not receive a reply despite several attempts of enquiry.

Overall, the target “Monitoring system designed” has been reached. The monitoring system is supported with plans, procedures, new skills, and sampling tools. However, since Tajikistan still lacks laboratory capacity to conduct testing for many veterinary medicines, agri-chemicals, etc. further success will depend on the ability of the Government of Tajikistan to find financial resources to outsource the residue testing, until the laboratory capacity is available in country.

Having identified the weak laboratory capacities in the country, the project developed a laboratory rationalization strategy which was handed over to project partner ministries for implementation, ownership and further development. The strategy was discussed and validated during a workshop in Dushanbe in May 2019 and re-assessed in January 2022.

Aiming at harmonization and adoption of agri-chemical and veterinary medicine MRLs with international standards (SPS Measures) and key export market requirements, current regulations and mandates of competent authorities were assessed by the project. Upon consultations with the CFS, the FAO chose the approach of amending the existing regulatory instruments rather than drafting a new one. The CFS helped to identify a legal act to be amended (“Veterinary Rules”). The proposed amendments introduce 11 new MRLS for key agrochemicals and VMPs in honey production for the following active substances:

| | |
|---|--|
| ristolochia spp. and preparations thereof | not allowed at the level of analytical determination |
| Chloramphenicol | not allowed (<0.0003) |
| Chlorpromazine | not allowed at the level of analytical determination |
| Imidazoles (metronidazole, dimetridazole, ronidazole, clotrimazole, aminitrazole, tinidazole) | not allowed (<0.001) |
| Nitrofurans and their metabolites (including furazolidone and furatsilin) | not allowed at the level of analytical determination |
| Dapson | not allowed at the level of analytical determination |

⁶ An investigation was launched by ITC and its Tajik local staff, but it could not be clearly resolved why the Tajik CA did not respond to DG SANTE requests nor informed or asked ITC for support.

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Colchicin and analogues | not allowed at the level of analytical determination |
| Aminazin and analogues | not allowed at the level of analytical determination |
| Grizin | not allowed (<0,05 mg/kg) |
| Bacitracin | not allowed (<0,02 mg/kg) |
| Tetracyclines, Oxitetracycline | not allowed (<0,01 mg/kg) |

CFS officials participated in 1 online Codex meeting. While the project target for participation in the Codex meetings was higher (4), the CFS expressed limited capacity related to staff availability and interest to attend more than one of the meetings. Thus, a wider participation was not possible. Additionally, no application was submitted to the Codex Trust Fund due to no request to do so, being expressed by the Tajik authorities.

5.1.2 Output 2: Strengthen capacity of the project beneficiaries on the usage of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines

The activities under Output 2 commenced with mapping the needs of the project private sector beneficiaries and awareness regarding the use and application of the veterinary medicinal products and agri-chemicals. Regarding the strengthening of awareness among private sector stakeholders, an information, education and communication strategy and implementation plan was developed. The strategy and plan were presented and validated with project partners during a workshop in March 2021. The event was attended by 30 public as well as private sector representatives and the media. Two key state bodies namely the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and CFS expressed high interest in the ownership of the plan which was further discussed bilaterally with each of the organizations. Finally, the IEC plan was handed over to MoA and CFS and its initial implementation was supported by the project. Five IEC materials (two TV programmes, and radio events, as well as three articles in the most popular local newspapers) were developed and disseminated through public and private media sources. The communication materials were developed in Russian and/or Tajik language and validated by a Tajik media expert.

⁷Project activity 2.2 aimed to establish a group of trainers/advisors for food safety related systems and programmes who were trained to coach final beneficiaries (see activity 2.3) like farmers/beekeepers, processors and exporters. A list of 60 experts from private and public sectors was drafted with candidates that matched eligibility criteria such as basic knowledge in one or more of the



food safety concepts, at least rudimentary experience in teaching and training others as well as sector expertise. Based on the profiles of the candidate on the list, the criteria for eligibility were further defined and the list narrowed down. For the actual training sessions,

⁷ Photo: group of (food safety) master trainers developed by the project

the 32 most suitable experts were selected. The trainers were trained during three main training sessions on Good Hygiene Practices (GHP), EU SPS requirements, on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) as well as Integrated Pest Management (IPM). The training sessions were carried out by ITC and international experts. The trainings included theoretical as well as practical coaching elements and were supplemented by a field visit to the production and processing sites.

A training plan that included 15 field training sessions to cascade the training to final beneficiaries, namely beekeepers and apricot farmers, processors and exporters was drafted.

A repository of training materials including existing mechanisms and previous training programmes on quality and food safety was set up to which the trainers have full access to. The trainers were grouped in smaller groups to conduct the field training sessions. Each trainer was either allocated to an apricot or honey training group.

⁸Activity 2.3 followed the training of trainers (ToT) under activity (2.2) and commenced right after completion of the last ToT session with a one-day workshop on 19 October 2019 to plan the customization of training materials per actual beneficiary needs and to a language and degree of complexity that can be understood and digested by farmers and processors who are often less educated. In addition, a schedule for cascading the trainings to final beneficiaries was revised after the groups had been contacted and regional venues for the training sessions were identified. The 17 most active trainers (out of the group of 32) helped with the customization and translation of the training materials (modules) into local language during regular meetings and discussions. The finalized training materials were printed for each group of training participants.



The first training was carried out on 06 April 2020 but had to be interrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and government restrictions but continued later in 2020 after initial government restrictions in Tajikistan were temporarily lifted. The 15 coaching sessions were conducted in the second half of 2020, had a duration of 2.5 days per session and trained 304 selected participants (162 beekeepers, 142 farmers and apricot processors/producers from different regions (including 28 women/2 beekeepers, 26 apricot growers/processors). The sessions were carried out in the main honey and apricot producing regions of Tajikistan, namely Sughd, Khatlon, and Districts of the Direct Regulation. During the coaching sessions the data of most company fact sheets (see Output 1) was updated.

All field activities including trainings were carried out with strict implementation of the precautionary measures such as providing face masks and sanitizers, regular thermometry of participants and trainers by forehead thermometer and following social distance. The health and hygiene measures allowed the continuation of face-to face meetings in

⁸ Photo: imparting food safety training to final beneficiaries (farmers, processors) by the master trainers

Tajikistan within short time periods in between longer breakouts of Covid-19 in Tajikistan. Local government regulations were always followed and respected.

Activity 2.4 was conducted a few months after the field trainings by the local trainers were concluded with the objective to observe the actual changes by the farming, beekeeping, and processing activities as well as to advise on self-control systems. Prior to the visits, the local experts who conducted the visits were briefed and introduced to the methodology applied, in particular about the selection of visits and sequence. Not all of the 300+ project beneficiary companies could be visited. Thus, a random selection of 53 companies based on sector (apricot or honey), experience and size of the companies and regional proportion was agreed and each company was visited once. The detailed plan for the advisory visits was developed and the 11 best performing trainers of the group that was trained under activity 2.2 were selected to conduct the advisory visits. The methodology and a questionnaire of the advisory visits was translated into Russian and shared with the selected trainers.

In total, 53 advisory visits were completed within the planned timeframe. All collected data was included by advisors in a project internal database which was created in advance of the visits and the hard copies of the questionnaires were filed in the project repository of training materials (see act. 2.2). The visits disclosed self-control system gaps in production and processing practices for both sectors.

Twelve companies and entrepreneurs visited during the advisory visits reported and provided evidence of establishing main elements of a self-monitoring system such as record keeping, certification of the products and processes (partly as required in ISO 22000, Fairtrade, HACCP, etc.) and showed evidence of regular laboratory testing, albeit mostly for quality parameters only. While the self-monitoring system was kept as simple as possible, the NRMP parameters were included by e.g. keeping a documentation about most important (and restricted) VMPs such as Chloramphenicol and Nitrofurans.

⁹In order to support the implementation of self-monitoring systems and following a request of CFS, the project provided 300 apiary certificates (passports) that were printed and delivered to CFS. The documents will assist CFS in improving control of honey production, bee disease management and facilitate the proper use of veterinary drugs as well as contribute to the monitoring system as the veterinarians. CFS is now better equipped to keep records of visits (observation, recommendation,



prescription of the drugs, etc) as this information is directly included in the passport. This passport also includes information on moving of apiaries to other production sites in Tajikistan and in neighbouring countries. During the advisory visits, three beekeepers in the

⁹ Photo: handing over of apiary certificates by CFS

Garm district in the Rasht valley region were granted the certificates by the CFS regional office in Garm.

5.1.3 Output 3: Access to finance enhanced for MSMs in compliance with SPS measures

The main activities under the access to finance components were to assess the need for finance and to implement advisory/training programmes for financial institutions and the project beneficiaries. In this regard online interviews and field visits to the target beneficiaries were undertaken to identify beneficiaries' needs in financing and to customize training materials according to actual needs. A comprehensive questionnaire was prepared and responses from 52 respondents were received who were subsequently interviewed in Sughd, Khatlon, and Rasht valley regions of Tajikistan. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted the planning of training and coaching activities for beneficiaries and substantively changed the situation respondents were faced with as well as the overall availability of financing opportunities in the country. As a consequence, the survey had to be repeated at a much later stage of the project. Information was updated to better understand the impact of COVID 19 on the businesses and to learn whether needs had changed.

The second survey revealed far reaching changes in availability of external financing, amount of loans and businesses in need. The survey data was analysed, and suitable SMEs were identified for further training, coaching and matchmaking with potential finance facilities. The assessment of the available financing institutions and service providers identified key national and international actors active in the agribusiness sector which were subsequently contacted and links were established inter alia with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Accelerate Prosperity, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Agakhan Foundation-MSDSP, Amonatbank, Sanoatsodirotkonk, Eskhata Bank, Arvand Bonk, Imon International Bank, and Consulting Company Nexigol.

The selection of SMEs supported under this Output and financing institutions was discussed and evaluated during a virtual meeting including the potential financing institutions. The meeting included beekeepers and apricot producers from the project focus districts for advice and recommendations on the selection of beneficiaries. However, no loans were granted through the support of the project as conditions under the Covid-19 pandemic were regarded too risky by the financing institutions.

Two workshops on "Financing quality improvements and growth of agri-business" took place in the Dushanbe and Sughd regions. The workshops involved 82 project beneficiaries (large and medium size beekeepers, apricot processors and producers including) and 8 finance institutions and service providers, namely EBRD, Agakhan Foundation-MSDSP, Amonatbank, Sanoatsodirotkonk, Eskhata Bank, Arvand Bonk, Imon International Bank, Consulting Company Nexigol. The workshops were helpful in establishing mutual understanding and conditions for financing loans. Participating SMEs clearly understood how to access the capital and engaged in further discussion with financial institutions. In addition, an ITC access to finance guide for SMEs was drafted for Tajikistan, printed and

shared with participants of the workshops. The digital version of the guide has been posted on the ITC Tajikistan website to provide free access to the guide¹⁰

5.1.4 Output 4. Increased linkages along the sector value chain and export markets

¹¹The implementation of Output 4 activities commenced with a stakeholder meeting/workshop which took place in February 2020 and brought together key private and public bodies active in pesticide export, use and control to debate about the situation in the country and to identify challenges that may have a negative impact on exports of



¹²agricultural products as well as to develop suggestions on how to follow a coordinated approach to address the challenges. The workshop assessed control, import and application of pesticides and veterinary drugs and monitoring of residues. In particular, the development and approval of the “list of authorized chemical and biological products of the Republic of Tajikistan” relevant i.a. for the preparation of the NRMP for EU honey market access and associated problems such as the lack of relevant laboratory testing services were



emphasized and planned for closer review. It was concluded that the list revealed significant differences compared to the actual practice in the country. Not having this list approved may have negative impacts on exports of agricultural products as otherwise it would remain unclear which substances are permitted in the country. To underline the meaning of the workshop and the severity of the problem, the event was headed by the Secretariat of the Consultative Council on Improving the Investment Climate under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. It was attended by 26 public and private stakeholders.

Other networking and planning events were later conducted virtually due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Based on the outcomes of the public-private dialogues and the identified issues with regard to exports and meeting buyer requirements, two two-day workshops on Export Quality Management (EQM) were conducted in May 2019 and in February 2022. The workshops were attended by 50 participants from private and public sectors including representatives

¹⁰ <https://itctj.files.wordpress.com/2022/03/guide-on-a2f-for-mmmps.-russ.pdf>

¹¹ Photo: training on export quality management for honey and apricots

¹² Photo: Public-private stakeholder meeting discussing pesticides and export requirements

of the competent authorities (CA) associations and producers of dried apricots and beekeepers. The last workshop was carried out virtually, as it became evident that despite a long waiting time, face-to-face events would not be feasible until the end of the project duration. The face to face (onsite) event would have been the preferred mode as the EQM workshops incorporated highly interactive sessions and group work. Thus, the workshop concept had to be altered extensively for virtual implementation. The workshops included a definition and discussion about quality and food safety requirements, the difference between government imposed technical regulations and voluntary business-driven standards, as well as mapping opportunities for business export market success. They also featured representatives from buyers (a leading buyer of dried fruits in Europe called Noberasco and a local honey buyer who supplies hotels and restaurants).

A series of field visits to the most important honey and apricot production areas (Sughd, Khatlon regions and Rasht valley) was undertaken to collect information and business profiles of the potential producers and exporters of the target products. Most of these producers and exporters also participated in the EQM workshops. The missions served to revise and update the business factsheets which were subsequently shared with the companies for review and finalization. In total, 27 company fact sheets were revised incorporating business needs identified under the EQM workshops and the access to finance activities. Out of the 27 companies, 15 companies were active in the apricot sector and 12 were honey producers (beekeepers).

In order to build market linkages, the ITC local project team coordinated regional business meetings with international (whenever present in the country) and national stakeholders and carried out a round table meeting on the development of apricot clusters: situation, challenges, perspectives to link with buyers which was organized in November 2019 in Khujand, Sughd region. The business meetings were fruitful in connecting local buyers of dried fruits and Tajik suppliers. A supermarket (Auchan chain), a hotel (Atlas hotel) as well as three restaurants were interested and established linkages with the honey suppliers and apricot processors. The round table was co-organized by the community organization "Women and Society" with GIZ support and was looking at quality and safety criteria for dried and fresh apricots which is the key Tajik agri-product with export potential and interest by buyers. Potential buyers in regional and international high value markets as well as in domestic markets were identified during the workshop. The collaboration with the association "Woman and Society" was very helpful in cascading trainings on export quality requirements in project regions which they did on their own without project support.

A potential buyer of dried apricots, the company "Noberasco" was contacted in Italy. The company representative participated in the EQM workshop and announced that a field visit to Tajikistan would take place following the work of the project on improving food safety and quality dimensions for dried apricots. The field visit to see potential suppliers in Tajikistan was planned for July 2020 but the Covid-19 pandemic made it impossible for the company to travel to Tajikistan. Following a few unsuccessful attempts with other buyers, such as "Magnum cash and carry" the largest retail chain of Kazakhstan and honey importers from Europe, who all mentioned the pandemic and related uncertainties as main barrier for new market linkages as main restraint to engage with new honey and dried apricot suppliers, the activity was put on hold. The cooperation with Noberasco, a large

Italian company active in the dried fruit and nuts sector was suspended as the company decided not to consider new suppliers either.

A series of virtual meetings with an international expert on market linkages for the honey and apricot sector were conducted in March 2021. In total 30 SMEs from the apricot and honey sectors including the association of beekeepers and international association of exporters and producers of Tajikistan were interviewed and were trained on how to present their business to buyers. A market survey report, exploring potential buyers in the EU, China and regional markets was prepared and several buyers contacted.

ITC had initially offered the opportunity to seven selected project beneficiary companies to attend the China International Import Exhibition fair (CIIE 2021) that took place in November 2021 in Honk Kong with financial support from a special ITC grant for companies attending the CIIE. Financial assistance was to be granted only to companies of the apricot sector as honey companies from Tajikistan were not permitted to exhibit in China. The support was provided for the companies Isfarafood, Usupov N.M., Toboni Isfara, Goldenfruit, Sitabr Agro, Mevai Tilloi and Apricot and Company and consisted of assistance for registration, submission of required documentation and technical preparation to participate at the CIIE 2021. However, the proposed support to SMEs to attend CIIE 2021 had to be cancelled last minute due to estimated high risks, costs involved and other related uncertainties in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic situation, e.g. quarantine to enter China, travel restrictions and safe accommodation, limited availability and costly flight tickets to/from China. The same companies will be supported for future CIIE after the end of the project. IT is likely that the companies will secure a place among ITC assisted CIIE companies in 2023.



The final activity under Output 4 was to organize a study tour to a major apricot and/or honey producer. The initial idea of organizing a study tour for both, the honey and dried apricot sector in Turkey did not materialize. As a second-best destination, a suitable site was explored in Ukraine which meant that the study tour was restricted to the honey sector as the apricot industry in Ukraine is of marginal size. However, the honey sector of Ukraine is one of the biggest and ¹³best developed in the world and the country was therefore identified as suitable location for the study tour for beekeepers. Ukraine is one of the largest honey exporters to the EU and the project benefitted from the availability of an ITC country office in Ukraine and its previous experience in organizing similar study visits. The project selected 12 project beneficiaries to participate in the tour. The 12 participants represented the public and private sectors, competent authorities, beekeeping associations, SPS institutions and exporters. The program of the study tour included a series of visits and meetings with beekeepers, associations, honey processors and exporters as well as competent authorities to familiarize participants with good beekeeping practices, honey

¹³ Photo: study tour to Ukraine. Local trade fair for the honey sector

processing, and export to EU states as well as establishing business and professional linkages. It also included a visit to a local trade fair for honey related products. Most of the participants evaluated the study tour very positively, connected with buyers and supporting businesses and prepared plans how they intend to impart and diffuse their new knowledge and understanding of the sector and export requirements with an emphasis on SPS measures. Another result of the study tour was an agreement between the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of both countries, Tajikistan and Ukraine, to closely cooperate in the honey sector, share experience and support each other.

6 CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

6.1 Gender

A gender specific component or support activity for women project stakeholders was not specifically planned for the project. However, whenever possible, female project partners (government, public sector, associations, farmers, processors, exporters) were included to and their participation recorded in all project activities. In total 112 female beneficiaries benefited from the project activities. Thus, although the honey and apricot sectors in Tajikistan are male dominated, the project succeeded in providing support to some women in both sectors.

6.2 Environmental aspects

The expected impact on the environment which can be attributed to project activities is likely to be visible a few years after completion of the project. It is anticipated that a measurable improvement in the application of agri-chemicals will have a significant effect on the environment, e.g. through reduced soil pollution. This is achieved through better practices in agri-chemical and VMP management and greater awareness in the Tajik horticulture and honey sectors.

A significant part of the project focus was on bringing the use of pesticides and veterinary medicines in Tajikistan in line with international practice. Internationally, authorizations/non-authorizations of active ingredients of agrochemicals and veterinary medicines depend on their toxicity for humans or environment. For example, a growing concern globally and in the EU is the toxicity of certain pesticides for bees. Bees can be affected either directly (through direct contact with pesticides), or indirectly (e.g., by collecting pollen from crops treated with pesticides). One of the regulations drafted under Output 1, is directly focused on preventing poisoning of bees with pesticides due to irresponsible or non-cognizant use of pesticides. Approval of the regulation is expected to reduce the risk of pollution of environment with pesticides and negative effects on bees. Also, efforts were put on identifying pesticides (applicable in the apricot sector as well) which are registered in Tajikistan but banned in the EU due to not passing safety assessment and bringing them to the attention of the Government. The Government is currently considering updating the national pesticide registration list and bringing it more in line with international approaches (Codex, the EU).

The master trainers trained and developed under Output 2 were educated about the environmental benefits when applying concepts and systems like IPM, GAP, HPHT, etc. It is

expected that the trainers will promote and create awareness around these concepts which will increase the protection of the environment.

The awareness raising activities and sensitization campaign helped in creating an understanding and consciousness among the Tajik population and a large audience was reached through the mass media channels.

7 SUSTAINABILITY

During the project implementation, selected project partners, such as the CFS acquired skills and tools needed to continue the official control and monitoring program in a sustainable manner- regulatory framework, procedures, knowledge and skills, sampling equipment, capacity building materials. These tools are very relevant to the current mandate of the CFS and will be put in practice and used in its routine activities. Capacity development was also closely linked with the CFS mandate, and it can be expected that the new knowledge and skills will be put in practice.

At the private sector level, the food safety trainer group (Master Trainers) was selected among experts who already have a certain degree of influence on the sector, such as beekeeping or apricot farmer group leaders, heads of associations, etc. It can be expected that the influence of this group on the sector is significant and that farmers and producers will follow the advice and teachings provided by the groups beyond the duration of the project. Through the project the trainers gained experience on how to cascade the training content to final beneficiaries (farmers/processors) and organized themselves independently of the project. They continue offering their services in the context of other projects or private initiatives. In addition, the food safety trainers could be contacted as focal points to identify potential suppliers of dried apricots or hone for potential buyers as they know the sectors well. Nobreasco, the Italian buyer of dried fruits could be connected to the food safety advisers to identify the best suppliers in Tajikistan that meet the companies standards and requirements. The food safety advisers would hence act as intermediaries to facilitate business linkages.

The materials created under the awareness campaign will last and can be aired multiple times. The project partners indicated great interest in the campaign which makes it more likely to sustain for a longer timeframe. The communication plan was handed over to the Committee for Food Security to create ownership and sustainable implementation of its proposed activities.

A plan and strategy for the rationalization of testing laboratory services was developed by the project and handed over to the partner ministries for future implementation. The costs and requirements for several scenarios of upgrading the national laboratory system are included in the strategy.

However, with regard to continuation of some of the activities and in particular the residue monitoring program, the main risk that can impact sustainability is the limited financial resources of the Government of Tajikistan. To be sustainable, the national food control and monitoring system should be funded appropriately. Preferably, the country shall continue to build its own laboratory testing capacity (medium to long term), so that all necessary testing

for the purposes of residue monitoring could be carried out nationally. Or, alternatively, sufficient financial resources should be secured to sub-contract an outside laboratory (e.g., in another country). However, it is not fully clear at this moment to what extent the Government of Tajikistan will have available resources to support monitoring programs, as it requires significant investments. The fact that Tajikistan was not approved for EU honey imports will probably make it even more challenging for policy makers in Tajikistan to request significant budgets that are needed to further sustain and upgrade the monitoring and control system.

The study tour participants widely disseminated the knowledge and experiences gained during the study tour amongst their network, i.e. the beekeepers association. One of the positive outcomes of the study tour was the signing of a bilateral agreement on collaboration between the Chambers of Commerce and Industry in both countries, Tajikistan and Ukraine.

The project's master trainers are a success story for sustainability as the services offered by the trainers are in high demand and the trainers have engaged in consultancy contracts with various funders including other international projects, the private sector and even larger international corporates.

8 FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

The project budget was US\$ 1,157,751 of which US\$ 890,676 was the STDF financial contribution. The STDF financial contribution was transferred in two instalments of US\$ 445,338 each. The STDF contribution was comprised of US\$ 795,246 for project implementation and 95,430 (12%) overhead costs for ITC's project administration.

The FAO budget for the implementation of activities 1.2-1.6 under Output 1 was US\$ 178,698 (net programme support costs) with an additional 17,870 US\$ (10%) in overhead costs.

The non-STDF contribution to the project amounted to US\$ 267,075 which included a budgeted in-kind contribution from the National Counterpart of the project of US\$ 189,700 and an estimated budgeted contribution from ITC of US\$ 77,375. However, the project monitoring during the implementation tracked a slightly higher in-kind contribution from project counterparts in Tajikistan of approx. US\$ 195,000.

The project did not use the full budget and will return the amount of US\$ 61,282 to STDF accounts. This includes a portion of the FAO-ITC UN-to-UN financial agreement of US\$ 19,008 which were transferred back to ITC from FAO.

The reason for the underspending can primarily be attributed to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic which was ongoing throughout most of the project implementation. The pandemic led to travel suspensions (international as well as national) and opportunities for group training or coaching were limited as well (see below lessons learned).

9 LESSONS LEARNED

The Covid-19 pandemic required to shift most of the project implementation from face-to-face interaction with beneficiaries to online and virtual communication and training. Working with the project beneficiaries online versus ordinary in-person meeting requires much more intensive contacts to build trust and productive working relations to achieve results. It also slowed down progress and required more time from all participants. It was not uncommon that the online connection dropped or participants in virtual meetings were not audible. However, the most important challenge caused by the pandemic was that it was almost impossible to develop trust between the project partners and the implementation team, including local and Geneva based staff of ITC. Activities were much slower, executed under contingency plans, and occasionally the follow-up with project partners was difficult, i.e. during the NRMP submission to the EU which caused above described issues. During the project implementation period the ITC team could only travel once to Tajikistan to deliver face to face coaching. The project completion workshop was also organised virtually as restrictions on travel were lifted in March 2022, after the project had ended. This should be taken into account for those types of activities or even full programmes which will stay online even after the end of the pandemic and lifting of all restrictions.

On the technical side, an important lesson learned was the extent to which consolidating knowledge transferred during the project into a handbook or similar type of publication is important for and appreciated by the beneficiary. Usually, the beneficiary and its personnel are looking for new knowledge and new skills, but often such knowledge and skills rather quickly become buried under the load of routine work and are difficult to restore. It is therefore important to make sure that such knowledge continues to be available and comfortable to use even when capacity building events are over. It should be consolidated, well organized, concise but detailed enough, and should always be "at hand". For this reason, the initiative to put the concept of the modern food control and monitoring system with all the details and practical tools into the form of a consolidated handbook was successful with the CFS, even though it was not originally planned in the project plan.

In case of technical training, the training of trainers proved to be successful as the trainers were hired by other organizations after their assignment with ITC and could thus further build and apply their skills beyond the STDF project. During project preparation in depth assessment of the international and national stakeholders were carried out to coordinate project activities and synergies. For instance, the project closely coordinated and collaborated with the EU funded project "Enhanced Competitiveness of Tajik Agribusiness Project" (ECTAP project), mostly on laboratory component. The project further collaborated with Accelerate Prosperity, Aid for Trade project through sharing its key outcomes and list of beneficiaries that can benefit further of their project activities.

Unlike the apricot sector, the Tajik bee/honey sector does not receive a lot of international attention and the STDF project was the only project specifically looking into SPS issues for honey production.

The study tour to Ukraine, one of the biggest honey producers in the world with a much more advanced honey production revealed that in addition to the complicated institutional

organization, the lack of expertise and knowledge in meeting SPS related standard requirements of import markets and the insufficient technical infrastructure, there are several other aspects that need to be improved in Tajikistan if honey shall be picked up as “product of elevated interest for export”. This includes the marketing, business linkage promotion and set up of production units. could be addressed and/or proposed for other projects supporting the Tajik honey sector:

10 CHALLENGES, RISKS AND MITIGATION

1. The biggest challenge during the project was the onset and duration of the Covid-19 global pandemic that had a massive impact on the implementation, successful rollout of activities and the coordination between ITC, project counterparts in Tajikistan and project beneficiaries. Whenever possible adaptation measures, such as recruitment of more local (as opposed to international) experts, online meetings and other media of communication was used to continue with the project activities. However, as the project needed several months from the signature of papers until actual implementation (see next point), the Covid pandemic hit the country at the most inconvenient time when activities had just begun to pick up full pace. The related restrictions on meetings, travel and impacts on global trade meant that several targets could not be fully achieved. Moreover, the necessary trust between the project team and the project counterpart which is a basic condition for a fruitful working relationship was also hard to create as this is often created through physical meetings. While a local coordinator was hired by the project to represent ITC in Dushanbe, there were extended periods of teleworking from home with no possibility of moving around or visiting project counterparts.

One of the adaptation measures of holding training sessions virtually did not always work very well as the internet coverage in the country is not very advanced, especially outside the capital of Dushanbe. The availability of local experts (to replace international consultants) was limited in terms of finding the best candidates and knowledge/experience required to work on the specific technical scope. The monitoring of project activities and results also became more challenging as ITC country office staff were confined to work from their homes with limited exposure to project partners and their work.

An independent evaluation of the project (within last three months of the project, as per project document) could not be carried out due to Covid-19 related restrictions on travel, meetings, and availability of key project staff in partner ministries and related institutions. ITC relaxed its Covid-19 related travel restrictions only after February 2022 when the project had ended. A project closure event was organised virtually on 29 March after the project was officially concluded. An earlier event could not be realised due to above mentioned problems.

2. The UN-to-UN agreement between ITC and FAO took much more time than expected and meant that some activities did not begun within the first 3-4 months of the project. Despite both organizations having local staff in Dushanbe, almost all coordination of project activities was done via HQs. The local project offices di not

have an efficient work relationship. This could not be improved much from HQ level as there was no opportunity to travel.

3. The main project counterpart CFS was newly established shortly before the project started. Thus, CFS is still new and continues with some “teething problems”, i.e. concerning the coordination with ministries and other competent authorities. Longer and more in-depth support would be required to change the control and monitoring system so that it can effectively function and follow its mandate. The willingness, capacity, and budget within CFS does not allow efficient residue monitoring. The rudimentary laboratory capacity is in need of an upgrade if costly overseas testing shall be avoided in future (training, equipment, accreditation). For the meantime, the only option is to request the more expensive international testing in third country laboratories.
4. Access to finance and export markets was very restricted and global supply chains had been severely impacted during the global pandemic. It was almost impossible to find buyers of dried fruits and honey interested in establishing new relationships with potential suppliers in Tajikistan. The availability of finance (access to finance) from financial institutions was equally affected.
5. Tajikistan suffered from an unusually cold spring in 2021 with serious implication on the apricot harvest and prolonged Kyrgyz-Tajik border conflicts in 2020-2021 with Kyrgyzstan being the most common export route for dried apricots from the Sughd region of Tajikistan (the main apricot producing region). Nevertheless, it is likely that the positive impact of project activities will materialise within the coming 3-5 years following the end of the project due to the end of Covid-related restrictions, more favourable climatic conditions for the apricot harvest and improved political relations with Kyrgyzstan.
6. Beekeeping associations are scattered in the country and do not coordinate/cooperate which is a disadvantage considering the low financial resources and service provision.
7. A considerable challenge was the ability and willingness of the honey and apricot producers to cooperate with the competent authorities in establishing the self-monitoring systems. The private sector seems to have little trust in the public sector testing laboratories.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

- Financial challenges and staff competency of most competent authorities particularly CFS requires intensive advocacy, involvement of higher-level authorities and regular refresher trainings.

- The CFS must build on the work of developing the NRMP for honey to enable Tajikistan to be included in the list of authorised countries for import of honey to the EU. The project disclosed that in its current stage CFS is not able to work on the application procedures and handling the required laboratory analysis on its own. There is an opportunity for other projects to build on the good preliminary work under the STDF project and help Tajikistan get access to the EU honey market. With external support the CFS should continue to work on the national residue monitoring plans - every year they will need update based on the current level of production, shifts in risk criteria and experience of the previous year.
- Despite certain infrastructure gaps, honey should be considered as a Tajik product with great potential for export. According to reliable sources in the MoA honey production in Tajikistan could possibly increase five to ten times if supported. According to the MoA, the number of bee colonies reached 258 000 in 2021 (vs. 223 200 in 2019). The production volume in 2021 was 4390t (vs. 4214t in 2019); 28t of honey were exported mostly to Kazakhstan, Russia, Saudi Arabia. 2019 (1.5 tons in 2019). In addition, there is an opportunity to grow production of other beekeeping value chain products such as bee colonies, propolis, royal jelly, bee venom, etc. A promotion of a local brand/Tajik origin could be promoted to support the good domestic and unique taste and quality of Tajik honey. Kyrgyzstan is gone a similar path with its “white honey”.
- It is recommended that the concept and the model of national regulatory, control and monitoring system designed for honey and apricot sectors is scaled up to other agri-food sectors of Tajikistan. The risk-based approach which is put into the centre of the concept is applicable across all sectors; many tools designed by the project for honey and apricots can be successfully applied in other sectors of food of animal and non-animal origin.
- More attention should be paid to planning implementation of the risk-based inspections; this would help the CFS enhance its control program, will make it more risk-oriented and more efficient. This will also help to optimise available human and financial resources.
- More cooperation is needed to improve the laboratory infrastructure. For instance, food laboratories under the competent authorities are not able to test apricots (dried and fresh) and honey against pesticide residues and/or veterinary drugs. Only quality parameters are tested regularly although more in the apricot processing rather than the honey sector. Thus, many laboratory services need to be bought from third country laboratories.
- The Government of Tajikistan should put additional efforts on continuing modernization of MRL standards of pesticides and veterinary medicines in line with international SPS requirements beyond the apricot and honey sectors.

- The project targeted sectors (honey and dried apricots) are very male dominated in Tajikistan. In case of future projects a gender analysis should be included at the planning stage of the project to identify product sectors of more relevance to women and hence to include more women in the project activities.
- The high number of small production areas and beekeepers with rather marginal yields of honey need better (shared) support facilities, such as collection and processing centres to increase the volume of honey that is required by buyers for export. Currently, the volumes of honey by each producer are marginal and of low interest to buyers. In addition, the supporting infrastructure is inappropriate to significantly change the current situation.
- Further work is needed on supporting the private sector in more cognizant use of agrochemicals and veterinary medicinal products and wider introduction of good agricultural practices and new methods and procedures for food hygiene and safety.



Honey producer displaying products during a workshop on Export Quality Management



Steering Committee Meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan

11.1.1 Annex A List of project key contacts (selection)

| Name | Organization | Function | Email |
|----------------------------|---|--|----------------------------------|
| Ganna Vasylenko | Independent Expert | International Food Safety Expert | anutaia@gmail.com |
| Haydarov A | LLC Nexigol | Head of company | Akhaidarov_sas@mail.ru |
| Karimov N | Union of Private sector deviation of Tajikistan | member | u.karimzoda@gmail.com |
| Khakimov F | Association of beekeepers of Sogd region | head | gufron_h@mail.ru |
| Kosim Kurbonov | ITC Tajikistan | National SPS expert and project lead in Tajikistan | kosim.kurbonov@gmail.com |
| Ludovica Ghizzoni | ITC Geneva | Project Lead, ITC (2018-2021) | ghizzoni@intracen.org |
| Madina Sufieva | ITC Tajikistan | Admin assistant | madi22@mail.ru |
| Martin David Rose | Independent Expert | International Expert on Control Systems | martin.d.rose@outlook.com |
| Mary Kenny | FAO Budapest | Project Lead, FAO | Mary.Kenny@fao.org |
| Mohliko Sharifova | Independent Expert | National Communications consultant | smohliko@gmail.com |
| Nabiev F.A | MoA | officer | nabiev_0249@mail.ru |
| Odinaev J | MEDT | officer | Jama-221@mail.ru |
| Rahmatulloev U | Tajikstandart | officer | Ubay.st@list.ru |
| Salibaeva Z | Comitte on Food Saecurity (CFS) | deputy head of department of veterinary surveillance and animal breeding | No email, 985877500 935828624 |
| Sattorov Firdavs | MEDT | officer | Fira_57272mail.ru |
| Shoev Talbi | beekeeper association Tajikistan | Head of association | talbi60@mail.ru |
| Simon Heisig | ITC Geneva | Project Lead, ITC (2021-2022) | sheisig@intracen.org |
| Tilavova Farzona Bozorovna | Independent Expert | National Consultant on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Food Safety Adviser | ftilavova@gmail.com |
| Xi Li | FAO Tajikistan | Coordinator on Food Safety and Laboratory Specialist | Xi.Li@fao.org |

11.1.2 Annex B Logframe

| Output / Activity | Indicator / Target: | Actual performance: (% complete) | Comments |
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| Immediate objective (purpose): Improved food safety and export competitiveness of Tajik SMEs through better use of agrichemical and veterinary medicines | Access to at least 2 high value markets improved for selected Tajik agri-food products | yes | Contributed. Access improved. |
| | Number of incidents related to food safety residue levels reduced by 15% | yes | Contributed. Reduction of 50% in official cases. Link to project activities not always evident. |
| | Number of border rejections of Tajik agriproducts exports due to residues decreased by 20% | yes | Contributed. No official border rejections at the end of the project implementation period. |
| | Number of SMEs reported improved competitiveness | yes | Contributed. More than 50 SME reported improved competitiveness |
| | Number of trade-related regulations improved with business sector input | yes | Contributed. 4 legal texts improved |
| Output 1: Regulatory and control system for use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines established and operational | Accurate database on agri-chemical and veterinary medicines imports, production, movements and usage established and available to the control bodies | 100% | Achieved |
| | 1 piece of legislation developed | 75% | Partially achieved. 4 regulatory acts drafted; in the process of approval. Regulatory acts are drafted, but time is needed to complete the approval procedure. CFS to continue the approval procedure. |
| | 2 procedures on agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines developed | 100% | Achieved |

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| | Annual residue monitoring plans produced, adopted and operational | 100% | Achieved |
| | N. of staff of Laboratory enabled to carry out laboratory monitoring of agro-chemicals and vet drugs residues | 0% | Not achieved. Online training was not possible due to technical content. Physical training not possible due to travel restrictions due to COVID-19 and unavailability of local experts. |
| | Tajikistan added to the list of countries authorised for exports to high value markets (such as the EU) | 40% | Partially achieved. Although Tajikistan was not yet formally approved by the EU as third country for honey import, the project enabled the Tajik competent authorities to understand, prepare, and launch an official application. The project also provided follow-up support how to improve the plan for the next application. All documents and guides that are required to prepare and submit the application were provided by the project. |
| Activity 1.1: Conduct the baseline study on the current import distribution, storage, use, sales and the controls of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines (inception phase) | 1 List of currently used agro-chemicals and veterinary medicines developed | 100% | Achieved |
| | 1 List of potential institutions and competent authorities that will be involved in the control system released | 100% | Achieved |
| | 1 List of exporters of dried apricots and honey with factsheets compiled | 100% | Achieved |
| | Baseline data collected | 100% | Achieved |
| | Exporters' fact sheet compiled | 100% | Achieved |
| | 1 Validation workshop conducted | 100% | Achieved |

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| Activity 1.2: Support in designing and drafting the regulatory and control system for use and traceability of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines | Concept for the system drafted | 100% | Achieved |
| | Legal instruments for setting up control system drafted | 100% | Achieved |
| Activity 1.3: Support in advocating for adoption of the proposed regulatory and control system | 3 workshops /meetings and sensitization meetings conducted | 100% | Achieved |
| | At least 50 stakeholders sensitized | 100% | Achieved |
| | Proposed regulatory and control system adopted | 60% | Partially achieved. Accepted by CFS at the working level, adoption to be followed up by CFS |
| Activity 1.4: Design operational risk-based residue monitoring system for agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines | Target 1: 1 Monitoring system designed | 100% | Achieved |
| Activity 1.5: Sensitise and train officials of the regulatory body on the risk-based monitoring system | One set of training materials developed | 100% | Achieved |
| | 5 training workshops held | 100% | Achieved |
| | 10 officials (including women) trained at national level and 100 at regional levels | 100% | Achieved |
| Activity 1.6: Harmonize and adopt agri-chemical and veterinary medicine MRLs with international standards (SPS Measures) and key export market requirements | 4 MRL standards harmonised/ adopted based on regional/international ones | 100% | Achieved |
| | Project application submitted to the New Codex Trust Fund | 0% | Not achieved. No request from the authorities for support to prepare a project to the CTF. |

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| | 4 regional /international meetings of Codex attended by stakeholders | 25% | Partially achieved. 1 online meeting only. The CFS expressed limited availability to attend the meetings and was not interested to attend online during the Covid-19 pandemic. |
| Activity 1.7: Providing assistance in the development and rationalization of the laboratory network for testing MRLs and veterinary medicines | 1 advisory service provided for the enrolment of the rationalization strategy related to monitoring of agrichemicals and veterinary drugs | 100% | Achieved |
| | 2 workshops on the laboratory monitoring of the agrichemicals and vet drugs residues conducted | 100% | Achieved |
| Activity 1.8: Support in the application for inclusion in list of third countries with approved residue monitoring plans | Contact with DG SANTE and FVO established | 100% | Achieved |
| | Drafted application and supporting documentation | 100% | Achieved although the application was not successful. |
| Output 2: Strengthen capacity of the project beneficiaries on the usage of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines | 300 producers/processors benefited from the capacity building interventions | 100% | Achieved |
| | At least 100 producers have improved the use of agrichemicals and veterinary medicine | 100% | Achieved |
| | At least 800 stakeholders have improved awareness on SPS and international trade | 74% | Partially achieved. 587 (475 male/112 female) stakeholders improved awareness and benefitted from project activities. This is only for direct support. It is likely that awareness and knowledge was cascaded to a much larger number of stakeholders. The project could not track this. |

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| Activity 2.1: Design and implement the IEC (information, education and communication) plan | Information Education and Communication strategy designed | 100% | Achieved |
| | At least 5 sensitization materials developed and distributed | 100% | Achieved |
| | 3 Press releases | 100% | Achieved |
| | 1 radio programme | 100% | achieved |
| | 1 TV programme | 100% | Achieved |
| Activity 2.2: Upgrade the capacity of local trainers and advisors to provide training and advice to producers, processors and exporters in the use of agri-chemical and veterinary medicines | One set of training materials developed | 100% | Achieved |
| | 30 trainers/advisors | 100% | Achieved |
| | ToT on the master trainers. Topics: GAP, Integrated pest management control system, Harvesting post-harvesting methods, the new regulatory control system. | 100% | Achieved |
| Activity 2.3: Coach farmers/producers and processors on acquisition and use of agri-chemicals and veterinary medicines | 300 producers/processors trained | 100% | Achieved |
| | 15 training sessions | 100% | Achieved |
| Activity 2.4: Support for producers and processors in the development and | 50 advisory visits to producers/processors | 100% | Achieved |

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| replication of agri-chemical and veterinary medicines residue self-control systems | At least 10 producers/processors with operational self-monitoring system | 100% | Achieved |
| Output 3: Access to finance enhanced for MSMs in compliance with SPS measures | 2 empowered financial institutions to provide tailor-made access to finance solutions to export ready agricultural MSMEs | 30% | Partially achieved. A list of potential financial institutions was prepared, and institutions were contacted. During two workshops financing institutions were linked with the MSMEs. A guide how to access finance for the Tajik agricultural sector was prepared. However, it cannot be claimed that financial institutions were empowered through these activities. One of the main issues was the limited budget available that did not suffice to support the institutions to the extent necessary. |
| | 5 loans that have been released to MSMEs | 0% | Not achieved. The main reason why this indicator was not achieved is the reluctance of financial institutions to provide loans during the uncertainty of the Covid-19 pandemic |
| Activity 3.1: Identify the gaps in the access to finance for financial institutions and beneficiaries | Surveys questionnaires conducted with more than 50 respondents among farmers, processors, exporters, financial institutions | 100% | Achieved |
| | Access to finance problems and possible solutions identified | 70% | Partially achieved. During two workshops for financial institutions and MSMEs of the Tajik agri-food sector, financial problems and solutions were identified and further assessed in a comprehensive guide for the sector in Tajikistan. However, it can be expected, that without the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic uncertainties following the pandemic, the issues and problems discussed would have had a different focus and other more hands-on |

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| | | | solutions may have been identified. |
| Activity 3.2: Train and support on the improvement of financial management capacity and access to finance | 5 financial management institutions trained | 20% | Partially achieved. Financial institutions were included in MSME training and received a guide on the Tajik agri-food market and its need for finance for growing the business. During the Covid-19 pandemic it was not possible to find financial institutions interested to participate in the training |
| | 50 producers/processors trained | 100% | Achieved |
| Output 4: Increased linkages along the sector value chain and export markets | Indicator 1: 10% increase in linkages | 50% | Partially achieved. While new linkages were envisioned and buyers were connected to suppliers through the project, it was hardly possible to establish long-term linkages due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, on domestic level linkages were established with five hotels, supermarkets, and restaurants. |
| Activity 4.1: Organize networking workshops | 5 networking workshops | 100% | Achieved |
| Activity 4.2: Train processors, exporters, buyers, officers of trade support institutions on export market requirements | 2 workshops conducted | 100% | Achieved |
| | 50 beneficiaries trained (a minimum of 20 women) | 90% | Partially achieved. 50 participants attended workshops. However, the 50 participants did not include 20 women. |
| Activity 4.3: Identify buyers in two key selected import markets and establish linkages | 10 potential buyers identified and linkages established | 70% | Partially achieved. Two of the international buyers expressed strong interest to buy from Tajik dried fruit and honey suppliers. In addition, 5 domestic market buyers were linked with the businesses supported by the project. |
| Activity 4.4: Study tour to selected countries to familiarize with market requirements and to establish linkages | 2 Study tours conducted | 50% | Partially achieved. One study tour to Ukraine was organized. The second tour could not be carried out due to travel restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic. |