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Nepal plants olive orchards to boost farm income

Olive consumption could improve diets and food security

Nepal

Nepal is not a country that comes to mind when shopping for olives or olive oil. But, that may change because of an Italian-funded FAO project* that has Nepali farmers growing olives to increase incomes and food security. The project established an integrated system to produce and distribute olive saplings that included developing olive-based farming systems and a national strategy to promote olive production and consumption.

The FAO project founded two mother plant orchards, one in Kirtipur, Kathmandu and the other in Kolti, Bajura. Two pilot olive orchards compatible with the environment and traditional way of

life within the project areas were set up with 28 different cultivars imported from Italy and a total of 674 olive saplings, including 36 mother plants and 38 boarder plants.

Nurseries with greenhouses and shadehouses were set up in Kirtipur, Kolti and Juphal and irrigation facilities and weather stations were established at all three project sites. The project renovated an existing building to serve as a laboratory and office at the Kolti orchard. Solar panels were installed to power the laboratory equipment. Two greenhouses were built and furnished, and two open shade nurseries were also constructed.

Awareness raising and advocacy programmes were conducted with the help of local non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and local farmers and women's groups. More than 1 000 students were briefed about the value of olive oil and olive cultivation practices, producing a multiplier effect when it came to advocating olive cultivation on local farms.

In 2009, 165 olive plants flowered in Bajura, 40 plants in Kirtipur and 12 plants in Dolpa. Most of them produced fruit. The presence or absence of olive fruit on the trees is a fundamental indicator of the success or failure of the project.

The project assisted Nepali authorities with the formulation of a national policy and strategy for sustainable olive production, processing, marketing and consumption through a variety of workshops. Groups of farmers and technicians who were specialists in plant propagation and olive cultivation were trained to teach their skills to other farmers. In Kirtipur and Kolti, 34 junior technicians and 42 farmers were trained in olive propagation, pruning and top-working. Training of trainers in integrated pest management (IPM) was provided to four junior technicians and two farmers who became master trainers. Two horticulturists, two pathologists and one socio-economist received a month of training in Italy.

IPM was adopted and the project began investigating the complex of indigenous and foreign pests and pathogens found on the local Nepali variety of olives and related plants.

The project was based on the existence of wild relatives of the olive in many parts of the mid-western and far-western hills of Nepal. Past efforts to introduce cultivated olive species from Europe had shown potential in these regions. Two and a half years after planting, the start of fruit-bearing by some plants was a positive sign that the European olive could adapt to Nepal with solid production. Normally it takes three to five years after planting for olive trees to begin bearing fruit and a further four to five years for tangible production.

***Project:** *Promotion of olive production and consummation in Nepal* (GCP/NEP/056/ITA)

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