Catalyzing the efficiency and sustainability of Azerbaijan’s hazelnut sector

FAO Azerbaijan Partnership Programme

Project symbol
UTF/AZE/016/AZE

Project duration
01.06.2020 – 01.06.2023
Goal & objectives

“Catalyzing the efficiency and sustainability of Azerbaijan’s hazelnut sector” (HAZER) project is being implemented under the FAO-Azerbaijan Partnership Programme (FAPP) by the Ministry of Agriculture of Azerbaijan and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) starting from 1st June 2020.

The main goal of the project is empowering smallholder farmers to adopt Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to improve production efficiency of hazelnut, with adapted mechanization technologies and services, and to increase the quality of nuts produced, with a specific focus on reducing the risk of aflatoxin contamination.

Through active partnership between government institutes and state agencies with private sector actors the project will ensure development of national standards based on international processes, guarantee reliable certification, and strengthen an infrastructure supporting GAP in terms of standards as well as their implementation. FAO’s technical capacity in crop production and protection, genetic resources conservation, mechanization, remote sensing mapping, bioenergy, monitoring, and evaluation all play an important role in providing the right support.

The project also focuses on:

- Applying Good Agricultural Practices in farms;
- Increasing smallholder farmers’ technical capacity through agricultural mechanization;
- Promoting the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) system;
- Studying the conservation of the genetic diversity in the country and its use;
- Investigating bioenergy opportunities and studying international practices;
- Reviewing the current certification system in the country and developing proposals for its further improvement.
Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of the project are the actors in the hazelnut value chain, including producers, processors, and exporters. Hazelnut is an important crop in the northwestern and northeastern parts of Azerbaijan (including Balakan, Gakh, Zagatala and Khachmaz).

The direct beneficiaries of the project:

- Smallholder farmers;
- Seasonal agricultural workers;
- The staff of the public and private extension services;
- Experts from the research institutions engaged in the capacity building activities.

Project Stakeholders

Stakeholders include:

- Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- Food Safety Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- Hazelnut growers;
- Extension agents;
- Providers of agro-inputs and mechanization services;
- Traders, processors, and exporters.

Expected results

The fundamental objective of laying down GAP standards is to improve hazelnut crop management system and enhance capacity of farmers and agriculture specialists on quality and safety requirements, leading to increased production, sustainable incomes, social equity, and environmental protection.
The project launch workshop was held on 10\textsuperscript{th} June 2020. It served to introduce FAO technical team supporting project implementation, identify potential partners, roles and responsibilities and present project implementation plan. The event brought together the relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), other relevant state agencies, development partners, producers’ association, and private companies.

The National Technical Committee (NTC) has been established as a platform for public–private sector dialogue and its objective is to improve hazelnut production and quality in Azerbaijan with a focus on smallholder farmers. NTC provides an oversight of project guidance and monitoring as well as facilitates critical reviews on Corylus genetic resources, status of quality planting material and implementation of GAP in hazelnut sector.
As a part of the project activities, **50 hazelnut demonstration plots** are being established; **1000 farmers are being trained** on Good Agricultural Practices through **50 training sessions**, on the topics of:

- Orchard establishment & management of soil fertility in hazelnut growing;
- Fertilization & composting;
- Management of tree architecture;
- Aflatoxin prevention;
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM);
- Harvesting, drying & dehulling operations in hazelnut production;
- Packaging, storage and transportation in hazelnut production;
- Quality & Quality Standards and Traceability in Hazelnut Production;
- Organic Agriculture & Organic Hazelnut Production.