

New project generates more food production



USAID, GEII and local government representatives meeting local farmers

By Ernest Petrosyan

On October 6 the farmers of Saimerlo, Marneuli, the Marneuli Processing Company and the USAID-supported Georgia Employment and Infrastructure Initiative (GEII), run by CHF International - Georgia, hosted an event demonstrating the success of linking small farmers to upscale markets and introducing new farming techniques to rural areas. They displayed the significant harvest achieved by their jointly implemented project which used new

technologies such as the drip irrigation system.

The lack of modern agricultural techniques and access to advanced processing facilities are just some of the many constraints on small scale tomato growers in Georgia, especially at village level. GEII has responded by trying to support small scale tomato growers in the Kvemo Kartli region by helping broker a deal between the Marneuli Processing Company (MPC) and over 140 local tomato growers. The deal aims to ensure a there is consistent supply of tomatoes for MPC

in return for a sustainable market for the farmers.

The new irrigation system and higher quality technical assistance from regional suppliers have helped farmers reduce production costs by 25% and increase productivity by approximately 30%. It has also helped farmers significantly improve the quality of the harvest and thus sell their tomatoes and other products on the open market for premium prices. The farmers are also now linked with their main customer, the Marneuli Food Factory. To meet the needs of the factory,

the farmers have expanded the area of local land under cultivation by 41 hectares.

"We are very grateful to USAID and GEII for this essential support. As you know, Marneuli is an agricultural region and agricultural development is the top priority for the local authorities and farmers. The introduction of new technology and the outlet are very important for us," stated head of the Marneuli municipality Zaza Dekanoidze. Speaking to *The Messenger* however farmers complained that they need new modern tractors and a big cold storage facility for their crops to prevent them from spoiling. Dekanoidze has promised to help farmers gain these by offering a cheap loan of about 500,000 GEL.

"The poor climatic conditions this year have clearly indicated the importance of using modern technology, in particular drip irrigation, which has already resulted in higher yields and increased income,"

said Arif Akhmedov, a farmer from the village of Akhlo Lalo. "Thanks to USAID-GEII we have countered the negative impact of unprofitable climatic conditions this year and generated more income as the prices at market this year were higher than in previous years," he added. So far earnings have amounted to \$830,000, of which \$336,000 is direct profit.

"About two years ago the number one priority for this agricultural region was the main irrigation system. The Government was responsible for the main irrigation channel, and this was the part of the issue. The other issue was getting the water into the fields. The second step was to link farmers with customers, and with our support the farmers have signed a contract with Marneuli Food Factory. I hope this support will be very useful and we will continue our cooperation with farmers" stated Brian Husler, the Country Director of CHF International - Georgia.

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