USDA Foreign Agricultural Service
GAIN Report
Global Agricultural Information Network

Voluntary _ Public

Date: 6/13/2013
GAIN Report Number: RB1304

Serbia

Post: Belgrade

Feed Farmer Outreach Workshops in Serbia

Report Categories:
Market Development Reports
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Report Highlights:
FAS Belgrade organized two feed events in Belgrade and Novi Sad, May 30-31, 2013. One speaker was from COCERAL, the European grain association, and the other speaker was from the Veterinary Institute of Serbia. The two experts discussed how good agricultural practices in the livestock and feed sectors, and new technologies like biotechnology, can improve the economic viability of the farm sector and help minimize food safety problems like aflatoxins. The Chamber of Commerce and the Vojvodina Secretariat for Agriculture helped to recruit the target audience of livestock farmers, feed producers, government officials, scientists, veterinary/agriculture students, extension agents, biotechnology experts and the media. The goal of the workshops was to educate the livestock sector about the economic benefits of following good agricultural practices and encourage government officials to follow science based policies that foster innovation.

General Information:
With the help of the North American Export Grain Association (NAEGA), who sponsored one of the speakers using MAP funds, FAS Belgrade organized two feed events in Belgrade and Novi Sad, May 30-31, 2013. NAEGA recruited Ms. Gloria Gabellini from COCERAL, its European counterpart, to discuss the grain trade and the importance of following science based polices to allow product to move to help bring down feed prices and contribute to global food security. Ms. Gloria Gabellini is the Senior Policy Advisor for Market, Trade and Sustainability at COCERAL and the Secretary General of Euromaisiers (the European Dry Maize Millers Association). Ms. Gabellini presented information on how to provide a safe and sustainable feed and food supply through the use of modern technologies in grain and oilseed production. She described global grain trade today and the prospects for the future, the different approaches to production and legislation in the U.S. and EU, some practical suggestions for mycotoxin management, and the importance of science-based rules based on international standards that encourage the use of the best practices in production and foster innovation and trade in biotech crops.

FAS Belgrade identified and recruited a second speaker, Dr. Ksenija Nešić, Head of the Department for Animal Nutrition and Feed Safety at the Veterinary Institute of Serbia, to discuss practical ways to reduce mycotoxins, throughout the entire farm to feed chain. Dr. Nešić shared her expertise on feed mycotoxins and how to manage this potential threat to the food and feed supply. In 2009, Dr. Nešić was selected as a U.S. Department of Agriculture Norman Borlaug Fellow to research feed mycotoxins.

The workshops were held in Belgrade and Novi Sad for about 30 participants and were organized in collaboration with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and with the Vojvodina Secretariat for Agriculture. The targeted audience included livestock farmers, feed producers, government officials, scientists, veterinary/agriculture students, extension agents, biotechnology experts and the media. The goal of the feed outreach events was to educate the livestock sector about the economic benefits of following good agricultural practices and encourage government officials to follow science based policies that foster innovation. FAS wanted to promote feed and food safety according to the international standards, the adoption of more transparent and science based regulations for biotechnology and a better understanding in Serbia of the potential benefits of the technology. Specifically, the program hoped to offer an open discussion that would better explain the EU requirements and, in the long term, reduce the number of barriers to this technology.

In 2009, Serbia adopted a new, very restrictive GMO Law, which prohibited the growing and trading of GMO crops and products. Those restrictions are not in line with WTO regulations and represent an obstacle to Serbia's WTO accession. Serbia's GMO Law also is more restrictive than currently imposed by the European Union. Serbia still needs to change the Law on Biotechnology to become a WTO member and EU member. Serbia is still adopting the EU Acquis and is in the process of developing the implementing by-laws on biotechnology. We believe it could add to a vocal constituency in favor of biotech if the livestock sector were better informed. Feed ingredients like U.S. corn gluten feed (CGF) and dry distillers grains soluble (DDGS) are currently blocked by the EU's slow approval process and, in Serbia, the livestock sector no longer has access to GE soybeans/soybean meal.

Serbia has approximately 300,000-350,000 dairy cows with an average annual milk production of 3,500

liters per cow (10-12 liters per day). This production is quite low compared to the EU average of above 6,000 liters annually, mainly because of Serbia's small-scale farms, poor genetic herd quality, and poor feed. Feed costs account for up to 60%-70% of the milk production price, so feed costs are very important from an economic perspective. In Serbia, there are approximately 80,000-100,000 farms with dairy cows. In January 2013, livestock producers reported domestic corn prices were 40% higher than the year before and for the same period of time soybean prices increased also almost 50% from $420 to $800 per metric ton. High feed prices forced many producers to slaughter their animals. Consequently, meat and milk production has declined significantly in Serbia over the last year. Coupled with the recent aflatoxin problems in domestic corn, the livestock producers are keen to learn more about options for safe economical feed.