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Agricultural Development

# Success Story

## Tiny Bees Unite Kosovar Serbs and Kosovar Albanians

**Pristina, Kosovo**—Who could ever imagine that a creature as tiny as a bee could unite ethnic groups that have had no contact in 3 years? As strange as it may seem, that actually happened in Kosovo recently when a disease that threatened to wipe out the honeybee population brought together the Kosovar Serbs and Kosovar Albanians, who realized that they must unite to stamp out the problem since bees, unlike human beings, know no boundaries.

With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), IFDC has been working to establish in Kosovo a trade association support network for agricultural input and agribusiness development since 1999. In early 2002, specialists with the IFDC/Kosovo Agribusiness Development Program (KADP) developed a proposal to the Canadian Cooperation Support Office (CCSO-CIDA) for a grant of 55,000 Euros to establish a revolving fund, which would allow Kosovo's beekeepers to purchase the necessary medicine to combat the parasite. The Varroa parasite represents the greatest obstacle to increased honey production in Kosovo; in fact, an estimated 30% of the bee population is lost annually to the parasite, which developed resistance to those treatments available on the Kosovo market.

After the grant was received, IFDC/KADP worked with the League of Kosovo Beekeepers (LBK) to arrange for the procurement of a supply of natural treatment for the Varroa Jacobsoni parasite from Italian producers. The natural treatment is Apilife Var<sup>2</sup>—an organic product that is environmentally safe and does not adversely affect the taste and quality of the honey. As a result of the grant from CCSO, the revolving fund has enabled LBK to import sufficient treatment for the 43,000 hives of bees and to sell it to their members/beekeepers at the cost price to replenish the fund to finance future imports of the medicine. IFDC/KADP and the Alliance of Kosovo Agribusinesses (AKA) assisted in distributing the medicine among the members of the 30 regional beekeeping associations that constitute LBK.

“Part of the IFDC/KADP requirement was that the treatment be made available to all beekeepers irrespective of ethnicity,” says Daniel Themen, IFDC/KADP Chief of Party. “It therefore provided transportation and accompanied Kosovar Albanian LBK association management to visit minority areas to establish the level of interest. For the most part, this was the first contact that Kosovar Albanian and Kosovar Serb beekeepers had had since the 1999 conflict. The level of interest by Kosovar Serbs was high, given their isolation and the relative difficulty of sourcing inputs and medication. Indeed, as a result, the number of regional associations involved in the project rose from the anticipated 20 to 30, representing more than 43,000 hives and some 4,500 beekeepers.”

Training in the application and distribution of the treatment was carried out in 33 municipalities, including the Kosovar Serb areas. The Kosovar Serbs hosted a major press event to mark the occasion, which was covered by both Kosovar Albanian and Kosovar Serb press.

By preventing the loss of bee colonies, it is estimated that the medicine will allow the beekeepers to produce an additional 65,520 kg of honey with a value of 327,600 Euros. The honey is sold predominantly in local markets and provides much needed income and food to these beekeepers. Economic benefits also extend to the horticultural industry, which relies on the bees to pollinate flowers. In future years it is likely that beekeepers from both communities will work closely both in the import and the distribution of medication and in other areas of mutual benefit in honey production.

