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Training Increases Income for Women

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The Ilkinjiler Farmer's Association was looking for a way to help its women's group earn more money. The nine members, led by Shekker Mollaeva, lived day to day off of what they could grow in their gardens and the small incomes earned by members of their extended families. In 1998 the Ilkinjiler Beekeepers Co-op, a subgroup of the Ilkinjiler Farmers' Association, invited Winrock's USAID –funded FTF Program volunteers to help improve honey production and marketing. Mollaeva and the women of Ilkinjiler were interested in having a volunteer come to work with them on income generating activities.

In a series of FTF assignments starting in April 2001, William Lord and Mike Embry trained and equipped nine women to process and package Turkmen honey and other bee products. Using \$2,000 donated by Rotary Clubs from North Carolina, a large capacity bulk honey melting unit and honey processing tank were manufactured to create jobs for rural women. Approximately 500 kilograms of honey was purchased from a local beekeeper and used to train women cooperative members in the fundamentals of honey processing. Bulk honey was melted, filtered, allowed to settle, and then packaged into glass jars. The FTF volunteers demonstrated each part of the process to the nine young women.

In May 2001, another FTF volunteer, Dennis Kolb, came to Turkmenistan to work with the women on jelly and jam processing. Lack of expertise in fruit and vegetable processing, and a lack of equipment were making it difficult for domestic farmers to compete against jam and jelly imports. Meanwhile, tons of fruits and vegetables were spoiling every year due to the lack of refrigerated trucks and the absence of a proper marketing strategy. Kolb introduced a simple method of fruit preparation and jam and jelly production, and explained the importance of a distinctive label and logo for the products to make them easily recognizable. The group was already selling honey and had a label in use, so they only needed to change the wording for the jam and jelly jars. After Winrock FTF staff and volunteers provided training on label development, the women learned to create labels and display their products at the local markets for an affordable price. Jam and jelly production represents a diversification of the product-line of this small cooperative. Recently, the women packaged 212 jars of fruit jelly, which will enter the Turkmen marketplace alongside imported jellies. The women have also started conducting training for neighboring farmers' associations on the production and marketing of these products.

Enterprise & Agriculture:
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The FTF training helped these nine women increase their net income to \$3320 per year, allowing them to meet their household expenses. In addition, they improved other small business activities including the sale of fruits and vegetables from their kitchen gardens and the sale of milk from small livestock. The additional income helps improve health and sanitary conditions for their families, and most importantly for their children.



These women improved their skills and also built self-confidence. Since completion of the training, fifteen more women have joined their new honey and jelly producing venture. The assignment helped to promote further business education for rural women, strengthen regional entrepreneurial capacities, and encourage more democratic principles in their families in particular and communities in general.

As for Mollaeva, the training impacted her life in ways she could not have expected, "I could not even imagine that my life would change so greatly. Now I have many more friends and respect from others. While trying to improve the lives of those around me, I made a difference in my own life." In addition to the honey and jam and jelly businesses, she became a supervisor of the Future Farmer of Turkmenistan youth group. In 2005 Malleava traveled to the United States as part of the USDA Cochran Fellowship Program. She has been able to share what she learned about cooperative development in the U.S. with her colleagues and now gives presentations on the subject to various groups in the region.



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