

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Date: 5/2/2012

GAIN Report Number: BU1208

Bulgaria

Post: Sofia

Dairy Seminar Opens New Opportunities for Farmers

Report Categories:

Export Accomplishments - Events

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Report Highlights:

On April 10 and 11, AgSofia organized a two-day seminar for dairy cattle farmers in Bulgaria. The goals of the seminar were to promote U.S. genetics and to provide training on efficient and modern dairy farm practices. The seminar also was a follow-up activity to a successful Cochran Fellowship Program study tour for local farmers held in the fall of 2011.

General Information:

On April 10 and 11, AgSofia organized a two-day seminar for dairy cattle farmers in Bulgaria. The goals of the seminar were to promote U.S. genetics and to provide training on efficient and modern dairy farm practices. The seminar also was a follow-up activity to a successful Cochran Fellowship Program study tour for local farmers held in the fall of 2011.

U.S. dairy genetics is becoming increasingly popular in the country. The industry estimates the market size at 350-360,000 does or currently over \$0.5 million, with potential for quick growth in value in the medium term. Currently there are three companies who mainly import U.S. genetics which faces tough competition from German and French origin genetics. More and consistent efforts are needed to promote the U.S. genetics, preferably at professional, farmer-to-farmer, and industry organizational level.

Dairy seminar

The seminar was held in Stara Zagora in partnership with Trakia University, the major local school specializing in animal husbandry sciences, and with the financial support of the America for Bulgaria Foundation. On the U.S. side, USDA partnered with the Babcock Institute under the auspices of the University of Wisconsin. The lecturers, top internationally recognized experts, included: Robert Kaiser, retired dairy agent with UW Extension, Matias Fernandez, a veterinarian, and Lloyd Holterman, owner of Rosy-Lane Holsteins. Lloyd Holterman, a well-known dairy farmer from Wisconsin, has visited Bulgaria twice in the past to promote U.S. genetics. He has established a reputation among many Bulgarian producers.

The seminar was considered a huge success based on the overwhelmingly positive feedback received by participants. Websites for the Babcock Institute and the Trakia University both carry articles on the seminar. Bulgaria's most popular agricultural magazine is scheduled to publish interviews of lecturers in its upcoming release. National and local media also covered the seminar along with several smaller publications and local press.

Initially AgSofia expected a core group of eleven Cochran 2011 fellows and a total of about 50 dairymen, mainly from Stara Zagora area. The event attracted over 100 participants.

Susan Sutton, Deputy Chief of Mission-Sofia, provided opening remarks encouraging participants to take full advantage of the opportunity presented by the participation of the American experts. More than 100 participants stayed two long, interesting days discussing a wide array of topics with the American lecturers ranging from the quality of U.S. genetics, to farm management practices, feeding programs, milk quality assurance, labor management, etc. Farmers learned how to be effective and profitable while producing quality milk for increasingly demanding consumers and how to conduct business in more efficient ways. The dairy industry has been restructuring, moving increasingly away from smaller, more traditional farms, towards medium/larger-sized more modern farms. Because of ongoing development in the industry, Bulgarian farmers who participated in the program were hungry for information about dairy farm management that would help move them forward.

The American lecturers captivated the audience by openly discussing practices of successful dairy farm operations in the U.S. – reliance on excellent genetics, constantly enhancing their knowledge on the sector in pursuit of greater operational efficiency, hard work and attention to detail. Participants raised many questions with each new question opening the discussion for new ideas. The audience included not only dairy farmers but also University junior professors, extension agents, students and representatives of Bulgarian governmental bodies.

U.S. genetics already generating results

Together with the DCM, Ag Sofia visited one of Bulgaria's most respected dairymen - Mincho Ivanov from Korten village. Mr. Ivanov, with over 30 years in the business, is one of the industry pioneers' of private dairy farming. He has grown his herd from 20 cows to more than 1500 cows currently. He used U.S. genetics exclusively for many years which generated for him not only superior production animals, but also countless awards at local shows and exhibitions. He has personally participated in and has sponsored key employees to several USDA programs held both in the U.S. and domestically. His farm was a prime example of the dynamics of Bulgarian dairy industry - a growing herd in a challenging and mixed environment of both old and new facilities and technologies.

Pictures below:

DCM Susan Sutton with the Bulgarian farmer Mincho Ivanov and American farmer Lloyd Holterman at Mincho's farm (immediately below left).

Participants at USDA dairy seminar listen to presentations (immediately below right).

DCM signs in the Guest Book at the Bulgarian-American Food Safety Joint Center at Trakia University (Next page top left).

Group picture – Trakia University Rector, select faculty members and Cochran alumni with the DCM in front of the main gate (next page top right).

Group picture – U.S. lecturers, AgSofia staff, Trakia extension project staff, America for Bulgaria representative and dairy seminar participants at the main gate of Trakia University (next page center bottom).



