Most Significant Change Stories

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Before the Project:
Agriculture has always been a big part of my life. I am an agronomist by education and worked as the Director of the Department of Plant Protection for the Municipality of Melitopol. When I reached retirement, and I was not ready to give up working completely, farming was a great way for me to supplement my modest pension. Before becoming a member of the Ukraine Horticulture Development Project (UHDP), I grew early season greenhouse vegetables such as tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet peppers, eggplant and squash on five hectares of land.

Market Problem:
Greenhouse vegetables are not the most profitable crop in the region

Project Activity:
Based on advice from Project specialists, I switched from growing greenhouse vegetables and now focus mainly on strawberries. I have attended a number of Project seminars and trainings; the most valuable for me was in Israel where I learned about the ‘tunnel growing technique’ for strawberries. Upon my return from Israel, I implemented this technique on part of my crop. That year there were heavy rains, but I was able to save the whole harvest of strawberries that were covered! I am also grateful for the material assistance I have received. While I actively invest my own finances into the expansion of my agribusiness, the Project has sped up my development by at least 5 years! In 2010, I received the Project’s Gender Innovation Fund (GIF), which catalyzed MITRA (the strawberry cooperative I co-founded). Then, the UHDP funded a demonstration cold-storage unit on my land; which has greatly increased profits and efficiency, since now we can offer buyers large quantities of cooled berries. Most recently the Project has installed a weather station that lets us predict adverse conditions and take action; saving us time and money.

Outcome:
My income has more than tripled and for that I am very grateful to the Project! Everything we have gained has been thanks to the UHDP’s credit, grant, and information! Finally, as a lead farmer, I am able to help other farmers by sharing all that I have gained from the Project.

Vera as an ABR: Vera is one of the project’s most active Agribusiness Representatives (ABR). She is very involved with the Ukrainian Women’s Farmer Council (UWFC) and always accepts requests to have field days on her land. As an ABR Vera passes on everything she has gained from the Project to other farmers in the region. For example the cold-storage unit installed on her property is used by 12 other farmers and facilitates the consolidation of the cooperative’s berries. Consolidation helps them secure stable buyers and higher prices because they can offer large volumes of high quality produce. Furthermore, as an ABR, Vera provides consultations for smallholder farmers in the region. It is not uncommon for Vera to give over 100 free consultations a month!
Tamara Pomiluyko:
Lives in: Zaporizhzhya Oblast
Client since: 2010
Status: Married with 2 children, 11 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren
Main crop: Greenhouse vegetables, 4000m²
Other income: 40 Geese
Income growth: 7,500 to 30,000 UAH (approx. 940 to 3,750 CAD)
Area growth: 3000m² to 4000m²

Before the Project:
My family and I came to Ukraine from Uzbekistan in 1987 as part of a Soviet agricultural project. When the Soviet Union collapsed, we stayed in Ukraine as farmers, but were denied Ukrainian citizenship because we had no Ukrainian relatives. Together with a group of others, we rented large plots of land to farm. My family and I lived right on the fields in small shelters. We continued to apply for citizenship, but we were constantly denied. In 2000 we moved into a proper house with a small plot of land to farm. Before the project we used only the soil and water and we built small tunnel greenhouses for our vegetables. This was not the most efficient way, but we knew little about fertilizers and we could not afford larger greenhouses. Furthermore, since we cannot own land due to our status, we are ineligible to apply for credit to build larger greenhouses. I am 67 and my husband is 72, and because we do not have citizenship, we do not receive a pension. Farming is our only option, so we want to be as efficient as possible.

Market Problem:
Un-documented status prohibits Tamara from owning her own land and expanding her business to its most profitable levels

Project Activity:
I first heard about the UHDP when my lead farmer (and neighbor) invited me to a Project seminar in 2010. I was very impressed with the abundance of information about fertilizers and plant protection. It’s really great because at the seminars they give out information, which I save along with the monthly newsletters. I have learned so much just by reading! I really like the newsletter, because even though we don’t have huge greenhouses, I still find the information very useful.

Outcome:
Since attending Project seminars and reading the Project newsletter, we use bio-fertilizers both before and after planting, which has improved our yields significantly. Our annual income has grown from just 7,500 UAH to 30,000 UAH (approximately 940 CAD to 3750 CAD). Before the Project, we used to farm hectares and hectares with our group, but now we earn more on a much smaller plot of land. In our old age the higher return for our physical efforts, enabled by Project information, is invaluable to us. Using fertilizers makes our seedlings stronger and larger by the time they are ready to plant in the open field. Furthermore, now the seedlings are ready earlier and the plants produce yields earlier. That means the produce can get to the market earlier, and we can get a better price. Although the Project is unable to do anything about our citizenship status here in Ukraine, the increase in our income as a result of Project information has changed my life!

“I want to say thank you to the Project and a special thanks to Canadians who pay their taxes so that we can get this help!”
Diogen Korelov
Director of Market Co-op
Co-op built 1st wholesale market in village
78 Cooperative members
20 Consistent traders
1200 people use the market every year
Market sells 100 tonnes/day during peak season

Before the Project:
Like other farmers in the region, I grew my vegetables quite successfully, but since there was no wholesale market in our village, I had a hard time selling them. In 2005 I became part of a cooperative whose purpose was to build a wholesale market, and in 2010 I was voted Director. It made sense to have a market in our village considering almost 60% of us rely on agriculture as our primary source of income. Before cooperation with the UHDP, we realized a few small successes in building the basic infrastructure of the market and attracting a few traders to do business with us, however, relationships between farmers and traders were weak due to a lack of communication and undefined terms of business.

Project Activity:
Since working with the Project we have made improvements to the structure and functionality of the market, as well as to the organization of the cooperative as a whole. To the market place we have installed electricity, running water and two cold-storage units. Operationally, we are working to be more organized and efficient. Project specialists show cooperative members how to grow better quality, more uniform crops, which we then package according to traders’ specifications. Roundtable events, which the Project helps initiate, bring together farmers, traders and Project specialists to discuss issues from the past season, and exchange ideas about how to improve outcomes for farmers and traders in the coming seasons.

Outcome:
Physical improvements in the market, including the addition of the cold-storage units, have allowed us to deal with greater volumes of cooled produce, which consequently attracts more traders. In peak season we sell 100 tons of produce per day! Furthermore, thanks to enhanced communication between farmers and traders, relationships are solidified and terms of business are clear. We now have a consistent base of 20 traders who regularly buy from us. Before the Project, I could count the farmers willing to cooperate on one hand, now the number of farmers using the market to sell their produce is up to 1200!

Even though I don’t receive a salary for my role as Cooperative Leader and Market Director, since opening the market and having access to consistent traders, my income from the sale of my produce has grown by 30%. These results are not unique; we are all seeing the benefits of working with the traders, and that is why I do what I do- to make things better for everyone!

“*We now have a consistent base of 20 traders who regularly buy from us.*”
Before the Project:
My family and I came to Crimea as asylum-seekers from Uzbekistan. We had nothing, and to make matters worse, we were discriminated against for our Tatar heritage. I started Umyut, a medicinal herb collection cooperative, as a means to survive. Umyut, which means ‘Hope’, struggled for years; missing opportunities due to poor logistics lack of access to legal services and unstructured decision making.

Outcome:
Since working with the Project, we have registered the brand of Umyut and designed the web site. Now with UHDP’s support we have officially registered 68 varieties of tea, which can be found in retail, stores and online shops throughout Ukraine. We always knew we had to register the brand, and we spent three years wandering around and asking questions. MEDA provided us with hired consultants that helped us through the legal process. The next step is to get certification for international sales.

Project Activity:
Working with the Project, our team of managers has created a strategic plan for Umyut's development. The plan was designed to change members’ approaches to herb collection from merely a pastime to a viable business. The plan works on the following three aspects:
1) Collection and Cultivation: Educating co-op members on herb collection and growing
2) Consolidation: Individual co-op members take their herbs to lead farmers who consolidate and bring large batches to Esma at Umyut
3) Post-Harvest Services: Sorting, drying and packaging

Market Problem:
As an entrepreneur, Esma had nowhere to go for advice or training on how to legitimize her business and expand to more profitable markets.

“What we have accomplished in two years with the project, would have taken ten on our own!”
Before the Project:
Even though I was born in an agricultural village, I never pictured myself as a farmer. I now live in a small city and grow grapes on a plot of land just outside the city. Prior to my new livelihood, I worked for the Police Service, as a teacher, and most recently as the owner of a small office supplies business. The cost of living in my city was rapidly rising, but my business profits were stagnant. I knew I needed to find another source of income, I also knew that any new business direction requires an initial investment of knowledge and experience. I chose agriculture because the Project was making this knowledge and experience accessible. I did some preliminary calculations about the profit potential of growing grapes, and based on information from my friends, who were involved in the Project, I decided to go for it!

Project Activity:
I decided to invest in grapes because in this region there is a lot of experience with them. I knew I could go to field days and get information from local people. I used my lead farmer's seedlings, workers, and experience to plant my grapes. He gave me a good deal on the seedlings and we developed a pay scheme in affordable installments. Shortly after my wife joined the Ukrainian Women Farmers Council (UWFC), I saw a job opening there, advertised in the Project’s newsletter. I applied successfully, and joined the team as the Assistant Marketing Specialist. In this position I participate in the organization of all educational events and I am in charge of consolidated purchases and sales. I find different traders and suppliers by going to exhibitions, forums, and searching websites and catalogues. I also built an online sales platform. The skills I gained previously as an entrepreneur serve me well in my new position at the UWFC; I know how to take risks, and most importantly, I know how to communicate both within the organization and how to reach out to suppliers and traders.

Outcome:
I have yet to receive my first yield from my grapes, but I expect about 15-30 tonnes per year at 8-15 UAH (approximately 1-2 CAD) per kilo. So far, the grapes make my eyes happy, but not yet my pocket! Agriculture is a soulful business; it is out in nature, and you get to see living plants. It is also more honest than retail business in Ukraine, where bribes are often expected. As for the UWFC, I feel our success in the way the members are unified and how they support each other. Also, it is rewarding to know that through my work I provide farmers with cost and time saving benefits! In my life I have worked in many different jobs, but I never really felt satisfied. I am very happy and fortunate to have met everyone at the Project and to be involved in both sides - as a Project client and as a Project specialist. I feel like I am doing the right thing, for my community and my own livelihood.
**Alexander Gerusov**

*Lives in: The Republic of Crimea, Ukraine*

*Client since: 2010*

*Status: Single*

*Main crop: Grapes*

*Secondary crop: Greenhouse vegetables*

*Area: 15 hectares uncovered and two, 120m-long greenhouses*

**Before the Project:**

Farming is not new to me; my father is a farmer, and before the Project I grew grapes on 15 hectares of land. With a hired labor force, I successfully grew grapes, but sales were a problem. I had too much yield for the local market and struggled to find traders from other regions. Almost half my total yield sold at an unfavorable price, or worse, was left to rot on the vine. Although this part of my business was struggling, I saw an opportunity to diversify with early season vegetables and grapes in greenhouses; which would give me a competitive advantage by receiving earlier yields. The investment required for this expansion was too large for me to take on myself, and financing terms from the banks were prohibitively unfavourable.

**Market Problem:**

In order to gain a competitive advantage, expansion capital was needed. Unfortunately, banks offer unfavourable terms and conditions on agricultural loans.

**Project Activity:**

I learned about Agro Capital Management (ACM) from the Project’s newsletter. ACM is a lending organization that specializes in agricultural loans, by financing agricultural equipment with interest rates that are half of what the banks offer. I approached my group of hired workers and we decided to each take a loan, pool the resources and invest in two large greenhouses. All together, we took a credit worth 250,000grn (approx. $31,250 CAD); which was enough to build two greenhouses, each 120m-long. ACM didn’t take collateral, since the greenhouses themselves acted as collateral. This was a big advantage to us because banks in Ukraine usually require three times the value of the loan; in our case, all of our houses combined wouldn’t have been enough! Furthermore, as part of the CIDA Innovation Fund, the UHDP offered discounts on the interest rates (which were already lower than those offered by the banks) to those of us who met the payment schedule. We paid off our loan on time and received the UHDP discount! An unexpected bonus was that the Project helped us find traders to buy our produce, both from the uncovered field and the greenhouses!

**Outcome:**

The ACM loan has been the foundation for a new cooperative-based structure in our group and the resulting economic opportunities. Our group dynamic has transformed since the loan; now everyone has a stake in the business, rather than just receiving a salary for their work. We are all equal partners and each member has a different role in the team; one person is responsible for sales, another, maintenance of the greenhouse and another technology. The greenhouses will produce a large quantity of early season grapes and the trader relationships that we have established make us confident that we will be able to sell at a favorable price, ahead of peak season. The trader relationships have also enabled us to reduce our waste and earn 15% more profit from the existing grape vineyard.
Before the Project:
My husband and I studied agriculture in St. Petersburg, Russia. We had heard about opportunities for farmers in Ukraine from my sister, and after graduating we moved to a small village in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhya oblast. My husband and I began a successful grain and sunflower operation, which continues to run strong today. It had long been my dream to start an agricultural business of my own, however due to gender norms and preconceived notions of the role of women in Ukraine, this was not an easy task.

Market Problem:
Gender and cultural norms in Ukraine make it difficult for women to start innovative enterprises.

Project Activity:
I first heard about the UHDP when I became a member of the Ukrainian Women Farmers Council (UWFC). The UWFC is not only a place for learning agriculture and business skills, but it also provides its members with a strong support network. Since my idea to start my own agribusiness was met with skepticism from my husband, support is what I needed the most. Thanks to the UHDP and the UWFC I got the support I needed! I showed my husband several examples of successful women entrepreneurs, and he changed his mind about what women are capable of professionally. With my husband on board and a capital boost from the Gender Innovation Fund (GIF), I started my own grape-growing enterprise; which was a pioneering business venture in our area.

In June of 2010, I planted my grapes on 1.5 hectares of land.

Outcome:
In 2012 I received my first yield: 2.5 tonnes of table grapes and $1/2$ tone of technical grapes for wine and juices. This is not yet a business yield; next year we will have the volumes to make a profit. We expect a yearly income of 200,000 UAH (approx.$25,000CAD) from the grapes, minus 10% for expenses. I was one of the first UHDP members to receive the GIF. I acted as sort of a pioneer, and I was able to encourage my neighbors to join the UHDP as well. At first, people in my community were distrustful of the Project and of the idea of working together, but I have noticed these non-cooperative attitudes that were left in the wake of the Communist Regime changing now, thanks to the Project. People see the benefits to sharing knowledge and working together. We have learned to be more open with each other, and that around us there are friends who are willing to help. As a lead farmer, I always want to help; I provide endless consultations, even in winter! To pass on some of the kindness I have received from the Project, I even gave four people in my village free seedlings so they could start their own vineyards too!

“Thanks to the UHDP and the UWFC I got the support I needed!”
Before the Project:
Before the Project I grew greenhouse vegetables on just under one hectare of land. In our region, growing vegetables is sort of a tradition; it is something you do because your parents and grandparents did it, not necessarily because it is profitable. Vegetables require a lot of special care, which is very time-consuming. With a greenhouse at home and a job during the day, I always had plenty of work, but never seemed to see any economic growth. I knew raspberries were potentially a very profitable crop, but I didn’t know which variety would provide the best return and so the upfront investment required was daunting. Objective, unbiased information was scarce since most available information came from the people selling the seedlings themselves.

Project Activity:
I joined the Project in 2009, at the same time as the group of three I work with. They are members of the same family, and with my recent engagement, soon I will become part of the family too! Through the seminars and field days, we became informed about innovations in grape, strawberry, and raspberry varieties, as well as cultivation techniques. We each have our own strawberries and grapes, and together we purchased raspberry seedlings from suppliers working with the Project, and planted them on 2 hectares of land. Recently, we took an ACM credit worth 70,000 UAH, (approximately 8,750 CAD) for a tractor and additional parts, as well as a watering system. The ACM loan structure lets us pay only the interest each month, and we pay the principal during the harvest season.

Outcome:
With the tractor and watering system, our joint venture is moving forward like a train! We have another six hectares at our disposal, and once we have our first harvest next year, we will use our profits to develop that land. Many people choose to grow strawberries, because of a quick pay-off. We invested in raspberries for long-term gain; so it is hard to say what the economic outcome has been, because we are still waiting. The Project introduced us to the most profitable and resilient varieties and has changed our business mindset. With access to information we are able to differentiate ourselves from others, by planting unique varieties and by applying the latest and most efficient technologies. Our approach to business is that we always try to do something different; for example if everyone is plants one variety, we will plant another! As young farmers, we are excited about our business and the many opportunities available, like new varieties, processing, and even wine-making. We are moving full steam ahead!

“The Project introduced us to the most profitable and resilient sorts and has changed our business mindset.”
Before the Project:
In 2011, when my husband passed away, I was left as the sole provider for my two children and elderly mother. I worked as a cashier but I did not earn nearly enough income to provide the kind of life I wanted for my family. I was left in a very precarious situation; life gave me a hard push that made me feel like I was drowning in responsibilities with no way out. Thankfully, the UHDP presented me with the opportunity to participate in the Gender Innovation Fund (GIF).

Project Activity:
I received the GIF grant in 2011; which provided me with all the necessary materials to start a grape vineyard. I also purchased a strawberry package from Agro Capital Management (ACM), so I could grow strawberries alongside the grapes. We planted my vineyard on Pie land I received from the government after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Project encouraged me to solicit the proper title to this land. I can still remember the day my family and I finished planting all of the seedlings; I felt so proud; of my son, of my daughter and of myself! At that moment I believed that anything is possible!

Growing grapes has not been easy, since I had no prior experience in agriculture other than keeping a small vegetable garden, but thanks to Project seminars, trainings and consultations, I am constantly learning and I am determined to succeed!

Outcome:
Since working with the Project I feel like a new person! After I successfully got the land title for my own land, I decided to help my neighbors do the same. In total, I have helped between 500-600 households get access to their land titles. When the village council noticed these triumphs, they approached me with an offer for full-time employment in the land services department. At first, I was unsure whether or not I could do it, but thanks to the confidence I gained from the Project and the partner staff, I believe I can do anything!

Now, I work during the day in a salaried position with the land services department, and then I do horticulture work in my spare time to supplement my income.

Market Problem:
Widowed and left as sole provider for 2 children, Aliye suffered from underemployment and lacked economic opportunities.

Hard work, Pass it on! Aliye has passed on her passion for hard work to her son, Nazim, who plays an active role in their farming business. Neighbors comment that his hard-working spirit is an inspiration to other youth in the community. Together with his mother, he hopes to one day expand their business to a point where they can provide jobs to others in their community. Aliye and her son both know that their wellness is interdependent with that of the community and that they will only feel satisfied when everyone around them is thriving.
**Victor Polyack**  
**Lives in:** The Republic of Crimea, Ukraine  
**Client since:** 2010  
**Status:** Married with 2 children  
**Main crop:** Greenhouse vegetables, 5000 m²  
**Secondary crop:** Table grapes  
**Area growth:** from 2500 m² to 5000 m²

**Before the Project:**  
In 2005 I decided to invest in agriculture and began growing greenhouse vegetables. I sold my produce at small retail markets, but there was a lot of waste and I know now that I was not getting the highest prices. In 2010, I learned about the UHDP from an advertisement that promoted consolidation at our village Wholesale Market. I attended a meeting and was very interested, although somewhat apprehensive about consolidation. People here are not used to depending on each other, so when a project came in encouraging teamwork and consolidation, and offering favorable credits and free agronomist consultations, we had a hard time believing it!

**Market Problem:**  
Lack of communication and cooperation meant people were not receiving optimal returns

When I first joined the Project we were told that in order to reap the benefits of consolidation, we would have to first get serious about communication. As a group we began sharing knowledge and plans about our crops; we even arranged joint agronomist consultations before deciding what to grow. Next, we started jointly purchasing seeds, fertilizers and other planting materials. The Project was instrumental in the success of our consolidated purchases, because they negotiated discounts from international suppliers by going directly to the country representatives, thus bypassing local resellers and ensuring quality. Consolidated purchases facilitated our successful consolidated sales, because uniform produce is more attractive to traders. Consolidated sales take place at the Cooperative Wholesale Market which was expanded in collaboration with the Project.

**Outcome:**  
As a result of our group efforts in consolidated purchases and sales, we can offer large quantities of high quality produce to traders from all over Ukraine and Russia. It is beneficial to sell to traders because their price is usually higher than what we see in the retail markets and the costs are so much less; we save time, transportation costs and we have guaranteed buyers. Thanks to the Project and the spirit of cooperation that was fostered in our group, we have reduced our waste, built stable trader relationships, we receive higher prices for our produce and we are constantly growing our businesses. I see such a bright future in consolidation that I am fearlessly expanding my lots and most people in my group are doing the same- in fact, most of us have doubled our total growing areas since joining the Project! Today everyone sees the benefits of working together, and we are looking for more ways to share resources and cooperate.

**Pride in our Produce:** Recently I saw a national T.V. program comparing tomatoes from Turkey, Spain, Poland and Ukraine. It was decided that the best tomatoes were from Crimea! I saw the boxes and knew they belonged to my group! This is where our cooperation has taken us – to international acclaim!
**Before the Project:**
I was born in the Zaporizhzhya oblast of Ukraine. I moved to Siberia when I was 17, and there I met my husband. Every night I dreamt about coming back to Ukraine; “it is warmer there, and there is fresh fruit”, I would tell my husband, but he wanted to make sure we would be financially secure before moving. Together, we decided we would move when we reached the pension age (which is much lower in Siberia due to adverse conditions), and work in agriculture in my home-town. When we arrived we reconnected with my cousin for advice on how to start planting. My relatives shared information on how to build the mini tunnel-greenhouses we used, and together we also built one big greenhouse. The small tunnel-greenhouses are easier and cheaper to make, but are less efficient. Since we didn't have the capital, we began with more smaller greenhouses. We grew cucumbers, zucchinis, radishes and peppers, however we didn't see much profit because we didn't know how to treat the crops, or what chemicals to use to stop the spread of disease.

**Market Problem:** Preventable mistakes often left Lyubov with unmarketable produce and no profit.

**Project Activity:**
For me, the most useful aspect of the Project are the seminars, field days, and in general the access to information. It is so beneficial to see the information presented in a practical way. I started going to the seminars and everything just took off! Now I feel like I finally know how to do things right, which is so motivating! Information and motivation are connected, because when I can see my success from the application of what I have learned, I am motivated to keep going! Now, I even go to seminars on different topics like strawberries and raspberries.

**Outcome:**
Since working with the Project our income has nearly doubled every year. We used to make 7,000 UAH (approx. 875 CAD), and now just 3 years later, we make 40,000 UAH (approx. 5,000 CAD). To support our growing business, my husband and I bought a rototiller, spraying equipment and the materials to build two greenhouses - all with our own profits! We have also doubled our area from 500m² to 1000m². We have one piece of land left to develop and then we will start investing into our house. I feel much more confident now that I have the education and the right information. Sometimes I hear people on the bus discussing their farming woes, and I can join in and offer valuable, tested, information. Our economic success has also made us more confident, now we set goals and feel motivated and empowered to reach them.

**Dutch-style greenhouses:** Lyubov's husband and another relative were inspired by the Project’s progressive environment. They designed and built their own version of a Dutch-style greenhouse, which open at the top to provide more ventilation. Regular greenhouses can be very long and just have doors at the side; which do not provide enough ventilation. Their design took off and they have begun a small greenhouse construction business!
Before the Project:
I was born in Crimea in 1937. When I was 6 my father left to fight in the Second World War. Two years later my mother and I were deported because of our Crimean Tatar heritage. We never saw my father again. I started working at the age of 11 and have worked hard ever since. While abroad, I met my wife and we had 5 children. My family has moved a total of seven times, each time we dreamt it would be back to our homeland in Crimea. I made countless attempts to move back, but each time the government thwarted them. I was even imprisoned for being a political activist. In 1990, when Crimean Tatars were allowed to return to Crimea, I finally made it back. Ironically, our old homes were still standing, although they had long been assigned to new owners. I met many hardships while trying to get established, but eventually I built a house on 0.5 hectares of land. I grow almost everything we need on the land, and in addition, I grow grains on 2 hectares of rented land. On our territory we have 1000m² of grapes, but selling them at a fair price was a challenge before, because the market is so competitive in this area.

Market Problem:
Many grape growers in the area made for a highly competitive market, and caused Ibragim difficulty selling his grapes.

Project Activity:
In 2010 Esma Khalilova, the leader of Umyut Cooperative and UHDP lead farmer, introduced me to the Project. Since then, I have received so much information. As a man with a curious nature, the newsletters keep me very busy! Whenever I find new information that could apply to my crops, I test it myself or visit another Project member to see the variety or technique for my own eyes. My five sons and I all participate in Project trainings and together we manage the farm.

Outcome:
First, the Project helped me find varieties of grapes that give an early yield. Now I am ahead of the majority of growers in the region, which gets me higher prices. Secondly, the Project connected me to traders. Now I can sell all of my grapes and get 1.5 times the price! With my profits from the grapes and grains I was able to buy two tractors this year. Now we have all of the equipment we need! Finally, Umyut has shown me the business potential of medicinal herbs. My business outlook as a whole has changed. I now have a more business perspective on what I grow; I look at the market and profit potential, rather than just what tastes good! I feel so happy to be back in Crimea, but I would be happier if our government would give us titles to our land. It is a basic thing, we are not asking for much; just for our legal right to own land! I care so much about the land and my plants and I want to plant more but it is too risky to invest in land that isn’t yours and that could be taken away at any moment. With our unjust government, we are grateful for the help of foreigners; the Project has really made a difference!
Lyudmila Orlova:
Lives in: Republic of Crimea, Ukraine
Client since: 2009
Status: Married with 6 children
Main crop: Strawberries, 800 m²
Income growth: Approx. 300%
Gender Innovation Fund Grant

Before the Project:
Before receiving the Gender Innovation Fund (GIF) grant, I struggled as a grain farmer. I also grew various herbs as secondary crops, but I could never seem to make a decent living. My situation made me a strong match for the grant’s criteria: low income, large family with many children, and dependents with disabilities.

Activity:
In 2010 I was chosen to receive the GIF grant, an $1800 CAD value. It was a full start-up package for strawberry farming: seedlings, fertilizer, drip irrigation equipment, agrofibre, and a rototiller. In addition to the material support, there are seminars from UHDP specialists about planting and care procedures for optimal yields. These technical trainings are also supplemented with business trainings. I find the trainings, which are ongoing, to be highly valuable.

I was one of three women in my village to receive the GIF grant. Since the grant, we have become active members of the UHDP. We joined the Ukrainian Women Farmers Council (UWFC), a non-governmental organization that works with the Project. Thanks to the UWFC we stay informed about programs, policies, and opportunities relating to community development. Between the three of us, we rarely miss a Project event and always share our knowledge.

Outcome:
The Gender Innovation Fund acted as a catalyst to my berry cultivation business and to the development of my whole community. Since receiving the grant and attending the trainings, my income has grown threefold! I was able to sell half of the strawberries grown from the grant, and I have even sold a number of seedlings; which have a higher profit margin. With this additional income, the quality of my family’s nutrition has improved, and now I can buy toys and books for my children. I am also investing back into my business; the initial 400 m² of strawberries from the grant has now grown to 800 m², and I plan to expand to 1200 m² this year! Using my experience from UHDP seminars, I am now experimenting with a small area of raspberry bushes that I bought myself. I plan to expand this area so my children can take over the business one day.

I now feel more confident, and this is important because when parents are on stable ground they can give a push to their children. The grant for me was like that push. I am very grateful to the Project!

Community Development: Lyudmila reports major changes in her village since the injection of capital from the grants: property values have increased, and the grant recipients have gained a sense of pride, worth, and cooperation. The cooperation between them has gone beyond the scope of the Project, as Lyudmila explains, “we trust each other now, and we want to work together to make this a better place for all of our children!”
Before the Project:
For most of my life I worked as an economist at a government-owned automobile factory. After 26 years, I lost my job and needed to find a new livelihood. I had heard about the UHDP from a friend, but I never considered horticulture as a profession, because even though I enjoy it and keep a small garden for my family, I only have a small amount of land.

Market Problem:
Unaware of the possibility for a profitable agricultural enterprise on a small plot of land

Project Activity:
My first exposure to the UHDP was at the “Golden Grapes Festival”; a large-scale event put on by the UHDP. At the festival, I learned that growing table grapes could be a profitable activity even on a small plot of land. Then and there, I decided horticulture would become my full-time profession!
To supplement my learning as well as my income, I started working for Valery Gavrilov who is a successful Agribusiness Representative (ABR) of the Project. Valery is the owner of a large plot of land where he runs a successful grape vineyard. My relationship with Valery has been pivotal in the development of my own agri-business. I implement the techniques and knowledge I learn on the ‘motherland’ (Valery’s vineyard) to my grapes at home. Sometimes I am so excited about what I learn at work that I run home at lunch to treat my own grapes in the same way!
In addition to what I learn from Valery, I highly value the Project’s field days. The opportunity to communicate with Project specialists and other clients from the seminars is so valuable. When you need help, you can just pick up the phone and say ‘I am from the Project’ and someone will answer your questions.

Outcome:
Since becoming a member of the UHDP, I have found gainful employment working for my ABR and now I receive a steady income. My own vineyard has grown from 30 to 130 vines. I am passionate about my work and I love having the opportunity to consistently further my learning. I have turned my gardening hobby into a successful occupation and most remarkably, I am able to sustain the same quality of living I did while working as an economist!

“The field days are the most valuable because otherwise no one would let you into their yard and show you the tricks of their trade!”
Before the Project:
Four years ago I would have never imagined myself with a career in agriculture; I studied law, and I worked as Manager of Legal Services for the Sevastopol military base. My wife and I decided to move to a small rural village for the sake of our children’s health, who were always getting sick in the city. We thought that the fresh air and locally grown, fresh food found in the village would be beneficial to their health. It was my plan to grow grapes, since they are the most profitable crop in the region, but I had no idea where to start, so I began growing potatoes and radishes instead. These vegetables are easier to grow and require less expertise; however I did not want to give up on my original plan to grow grapes. I did some web research, which by chance, led me to one of the Project’s lead farmers, Ivan Zakharenko. Ivan sold me my first 40 seedlings; he picked out 17 different sorts for me to experiment with, and gave me advice on proper planting and care techniques. Ivan also introduced me to the UHDP.

Market Problem:
Lack of practical knowledge about grape farming prevented Roman from growing the most profitable crop in his region

Project Activity:
I joined the UHDP to take advantage of the learning opportunities available. I have attended countless seminars, conferences, and often visit fellow Project members for advice. In fact, one of the most impactful aspects has been getting to know experienced people in the field. Along with Ivan, I owe my success to my ‘teacher,’ Sergey Turansky. Sergey is also a UHDP client and grows over 160 sorts, with extraordinary yields. I have visited him for consultations over 15 times in the last year alone! Along with seminars, field days, and advice from other UHDP clients, I also receive day-to-day support from specialists. If I ever have a problem with my grapes, I take a photo, e-mail it to a Project specialist and in the same day I get professional advice. Furthermore, the specialists provide me with analyses of the soil and water that allow me to make educated and informed decisions about what to grow, when and how.

Outcome:
If it were not for the Project, I would not have my grapes. I have two greenhouses, one is 250 m² and the other is 450 m²; each contains a different sort. Of the 17 seedlings I purchased, I have narrowed them down to the two most resilient and profitable sorts. One of the sorts that I grow can be sold for up to 60 UAH/kg (approx. $7.50 CAD)! My grapes are still very young; this year I expect a yield of 400 kg, but in four more years, I can expect 6 or 7 tonnes from the same area. I started as a complete beginner, but I have learned so much from the Project that now some people come to me for consultations! While my success with my grape-vineyard has led to economic gains, the most important benefits come from being able to provide for a healthy lifestyle for my family.
Natalia Kvitka
Lives in: Zaporizhzhya Oblast
Client since: 2009
Status: Married with 2 Children
Main crop: Medicinal herbs
Area: 5000m² of herbs, 1000m² of grapes
Other income: Husband’s earnings from his job in construction

Before the Project:
I used to be a National Champion in academic rowing. When I finished my education, I moved back to the Zaporizhzhya oblast to work as a kindergarten and gym teacher, but I felt that there was no room to grow in this field. When my great-grandfather moved to Zaporizhzhya years ago, he said he was “bringing his family to abundance” and I feel as though it is the wish of my ancestors for me to work this land! A friend told me about the many opportunities of the Project. I took it as a sign to start cultivating medicinal herbs, which had always been a part of my life as a child, athlete, and caretaker.

Project Activity:
The project gave me ideas and confidence-- the well-founded idea that medicinal herbs can be profitable and the confidence that comes with knowing how to do things right. I grow Lemon Balm, Calendula, Catnip, Thyme, Tarragon, Oregano and Mint on 0.5 hectares. I often go to seminars in Crimea, run by the Umyut cluster, to learn about the best way to cultivate and care for these herbs. Since I have had such a positive experience with the Project, I encourage others to cultivate medicinal herbs as well, and I run field days on my property to show them how. I only have a small territory, so I know that in order to do this as a business, it is essential to work together and consolidate. The Project ultimately connected me with like-minded people that see the value in medical herb cultivation and organic farming principles. Along with 40 others in my community, I formed an organic cooperative. We are officially registered and our members have all gotten seeds, but we are still experimenting with the best ways to operate.

Outcome:
I used to grow herbs for myself, but the Project showed me how I could do it on a business level. Not only do I make a living doing what I love, but I also feel proud of providing an organic, high-quality product to the community. In life you need to be happy, you need to do what you love, and I can truly say that I love my job! In regards to how the Project has impacted my life economically, I started with nothing so there has definitely been significant growth! I sell my products myself; I go to festivals and exhibitions where I meet buyers, I give samples, and everyone buys my herbs- my product truly sells itself! I have always gone after my dreams, and my dream today is for our cooperative to become a prestigious worldwide brand. It is about time for people to stop cheating each other and start producing high quality products for others to enjoy.

Market Problem:
Natalia felt there was no room to grow in her current profession and was looking for new opportunities

Natalia’s business strategy is to sell only one type of herb per package, and she always gives samples, “this way a person’s nose can distinguish what their body needs for healing.” The practice also helps her business, since people end up buying more, so they can make their own mixed teas from the herbs they liked best.
Before the Project:
For 16 years I worked as a taxi driver. When I first started growing grapes 13 years ago, I had to divide my time between both jobs. My biggest problem was finding information; I relied solely on an agricultural newsletter for information and techniques. With the newsletters as my only source of information, I made many mistakes that often left my grapes sick. Whenever there was a disease, we would spend countless hours searching through the newsletters, hoping to find the right diagnosis and proper treatment. I first learned about the UHDP when a friend of mine, who is a UHDP client, showed me the Project’s newsletter. I decided to join the UHDP so that I could receive access to the wide range of information available to Project clients.

Project Activity:
Since joining the Project, I have attended a number of seminars and have actively used the consultation services. The seminars are valuable because you can connect with other farmers and also with seedling, fertilizer and agro-technology suppliers. The suppliers make presentations on how to grow and care for different crops. Since attending the seminars, I have become sort of an expert on grapes myself! Furthermore, through the Project’s client network, I have the ability to share my knowledge with other farmers who are just starting out. Many farmers come to me for help regularly. It is not unusual to provide consultations 3 or 4 times a week, and sometimes I spend half a day with just one person. I am happy to be a resource for others since I struggled so much in the beginning and have received so much support from the Project.

Outcome:
I have become much more efficient, and as a result my quality, yield and profits have increased. Thanks to information from the Project staff and seminars, my 2,200 m² of grapes give double the average yield; I even have some bushes that yield up to 50kg! I spent 16 years as a taxi driver and now I don’t have to do it at all; I stopped since my grapes are thriving. It all boils down to efficiency. Now that I am able to call a specialist or ask a fellow Project member when I have a problem, instead of wasting time trying to diagnose the problem and cure it from newsletters in our library, I have more time to give individual attention to every plant. I walk around each plant every day, I check them all individually, clip off what is not necessary, and I water one plant more than another if necessary. My grapes are of such high quality that one of my sorts won first prize at the Project’s Golden Grapes Festival! Everything has gotten better; I have more free time and our economic situation has improved. Thanks to the increase in income from our grapes, we were able to build our new home!

Market Problem:
Insufficient resources on proper grape-growing techniques, disease prevention and disease treatment procedures

Sergey Turovsky
Lives in: The Republic of Crimea, Ukraine
Client since: 2009
Status: Married, 2 children
Main crop, area: Grapes, 2,200 m²
Secondary crop: Strawberries
Income growth: Doubled since joining the UHDP
Tatiana Prigoda
Lives in: Zaporizhzhya Oblast
Client since: 2009
Status: Married with 3 children
Main crop: Greenhouse vegetables
Income growth: 500%
Area growth: 1000m$^2$ to 5000m$^2$

**Before the Project:**
I am originally from Western Ukraine. I came to Zaporizhzhya to visit my aunts but I met my husband and ended up staying! Before the Project, our villagers did not share information, even amongst relatives! People would often get cheated with poor quality seeds because they worked individually and without communication. This is because when you deal in small, one-time transactions, there is no incentive for a retailer to provide good quality. We have all been negatively affected by our lack of communication regarding suppliers’ reputations. One time, my husband and I bought seeds from someone on their word that they were good, but the tomatoes just didn’t grow! The quality of the seed is the starting point. Without a good seed, there is no chance you can make a good profit.

**Project Activity:**
My husband heard about the UHDP from a friend. We attended seminars and learned a lot, even how to build a greenhouse. We knew of many people in our community who could really benefit from the Project’s information, so we started inviting the neighbors to Project seminars. People’s mindsets began to change. Before the Project, when there was no new information flowing into the area, everyone was reluctant to share their knowledge and experience. After feeling the abundance of information provided by the Project, people started to trust each other and we began to work together. Now we buy seeds, and other materials in groups of 15. As a group, we are able to order directly from the supplier, which ensures quality. What’s more, the Project brings in specific seed companies at our request, to give presentations and to listen to our feedback.

**Outcome:**
By joining together not only do we get better seeds, we are also more informed about the different varieties of seeds available. Now that we have a direct link with the suppliers and have effectively bypassed middlemen, we are guaranteed quality because the suppliers are more accountable to us. Furthermore, consolidated purchases save us money. We saved almost 50% buying seeds as a group! My husband and I have grown our business substantially since cooperating with the Project. Our farmed area has grown from 1000m$^2$ to 5000 m$^2$, we were able to replace our small tunnel greenhouses with large, high quality greenhouses (that we built ourselves!), and our income has increased nearly five times! We have really felt the impact of the Project in our capacity to reinvest in our business since our expansions have been entirely funded by our profits.

“No now that we have a direct link with the suppliers... we are guaranteed quality because the suppliers are more accountable to us.”
Vladimir Bizyaev
Lives in: Zaporizhzhya Oblast
Client since: 2010
Status: Married with grown children
Main crop: Greenhouse grapes
Lead Farmer: Yes
Area under Project crop: 2500m²
Other income: Pension

Before the Project:
Prior to my retirement, I worked for the government and at various educational institutions. I have been growing grapes for 20 years, but since retiring, they have become my main source of income. The Kaminka Dneprovski region is ideal for grapes, due to excellent soil quality and a microclimate that allows for an early harvest. In the past, the area was a settlement for people trying to escape mandatory military service. It was also home to Crimean Tartars who had immigrated illegally. Presently, there are many people growing grapes in the region, and we all face similar problems, but because of the nature of the region’s history, everyone was very secretive.

Project Activity:
Since becoming a UHDP member, I have attended many seminars. At the seminars, I have met so many other grape growers, and I realized that I was not alone in the problems I faced growing and selling grapes. It became clear that everyone struggled with falsified chemicals and fertilizers, deciding on the best varieties, and finding a fair price. The same group of enthusiastic grape growers could be found at most Project seminars, and a bond formed between us. The community slowly started to open up.

In 2011, at a Project seminar, I vocalized a need to unite the grape growers of the area. We all had similar problems, and it made sense for us to work together to solve them through our cumulative knowledge. Another benefit of working together is that we can take advantage of the opportunities for joint purchases and sales facilitated by the Project. It was decided that I should be the leader of our joint initiative.

Outcome:
The Project brought us together and showed us our potential. Our group started with 12 representatives from different villages in 2011, and now we are up to 60. The cooperative nature of the Project’s field days and seminars inspired me to leverage the experience of our group, and organize seminars not only locally but between villages as well. Our first accomplishment was that we were able to narrow down the 250 varieties that were grown within the region, to the six varieties that have the highest profit potential. It is important that we all grow the same varieties so we can run educational events specific to our needs and make consolidated purchases and sales. Next, we applied a similar meticulous approach as we did for choosing the grapes to find the most legitimate and cost-effective suppliers. The Project connected us to the suppliers and we have established solid relationships.

Market Problem:
The historically closed community made it especially difficult to promote information exchange and collaboration.

Vladimir’s vision for the Association of Grape Growers: Our long term vision is the establishment of a commodity exchange that will benefit the Association of Grape Growers through negotiations with buyers in Ukraine and internationally by providing profitable markets with stable prices for members. I hope to bring together 300 members in this area.
Before the Project:
Before beginning my farming business, I had to take on various jobs in order to give my family the best life possible. I was unsatisfied with this fragmented work because nothing resembled a serious profession and I felt very unstable. I liked the idea of agriculture because it is good, honest, and hard work. With the help of my uncle I began growing greenhouse vegetables. In our area I did some small-scale consolidations with other farmers and due to my central location, I naturally became the leader of an informal group of 7.

Market Problem:
Reshat sought a meaningful, full-time profession, but was only able to find fragmented, temporary jobs.

Project Activity:
UHDP staff asked me to be a lead farmer because of my experience leading my small group. With the help of the Project we installed a cold-storage unit and a Measurement Information System (MIS) on my property, for the group. The Project found traders for us to work with, and since then I have maintained these relationships. Traders now come directly to me and say how much produce they need and how it should be packaged. Then I communicate that back to the group, and organize the collection and sale.

Outcome:
Thanks to the Project I have one full time job and I am able to work in a professional way. Now, I negotiate with traders and actively facilitate my group’s consolidation. The MIS not only allows me to predict adverse weather conditions, but it also lets me see up-to-date market prices, helping me track my sales and plan for optimal efficiency. I have doubled my crop area, tripled my income and I can provide a stable quality of life for my family. My group of 7 farmers has grown to 30. This keeps me very busy giving consultations and coordinating activities. Also, I really appreciate the monthly Project newsletters; I keep them in a library that I often refer to. Thanks to the newsletters, I can apply the latest planting and care techniques to my crops, I stay informed about future opportunities in agriculture, and I use them as a theoretical base for discussions with Project agronomists.

Most importantly, thanks to the UHDP I have found a meaningful a sustainable livelihood. I now consider myself a medium sized farmer, which makes me feel confident about the future of my business. I see real potential in agriculture and my successes to date have inspired my son to study agronomy. I am proud of my profession because:

“Agriculture is a good, honest and meaningful profession; we farmers will not be out of work as long as people need to eat!”