

Reviving Akhaltsikhe (Meskhetian) Wheat Tsiteli Doli and Setting up Effective Market Chain for Its Sustainable Use

Under Eco Awards 2009 Program, Biological Farming Association Elkana implemented a project aimed at reducing the negative impact of agriculture on the environment in Samtskhe-Javakheti region and preserving the local agro-bio diversity through introduction of the sustainable use of endemic species. Today, when several hundreds of cultivated plants are forgotten and in some cases, completely lost, it is very important to take measures for reviving these traditional products.

Meskhetian *Tsiteli (Red) Doli* wheat, which was sown by Georgian people from the time immemorial, now become one of the endangered endemic species. The

possesses unique features, such as resistance to cold, drought, parasites and diseases. This variety of wheat is easy and less expensive to yield, because it does not require intensive care or fertilizer. Nor does it require special care. Most importantly, the bread is wholesome and has numerous health benefits.



*Photo by: Biological Farming Association Elkana
Akhaltsike (Meskhetian) Tsiteli Doli Wheat*

Project Objectives

- Introduce and promote bio-farming principles broadly in Samtskhe-Javakheti region;
- Revive the wheat *Tsiteli Doli* to produce enough for commercial use;
- Improve the socio-economic conditions of farmers in Samtskhe-Javakheti through the establishment of a bio-wheat marketing chain.

Implemented Activities and Results

- Tsiteli Doli wheat was sown on the thirty hectares of land (ten ha in the first year and twenty ha in the second year) in the following villages of Samtskhe-Javakheti region: Klde, Tsnisi, Minadze, Ivilita, Tskurti, Saro, Vale, Tskordza, Ghreli.
- The members of the Association of Farmers of Samtskhe-Javakheti Region Farezi, who participated in the project, provided eight trainings during two years. The training courses were focused on the following topics:
 1. Basics of organic farming
 2. Crop production: soil agro-technology, pest control, tillage, preparing seed material and sowing
 3. Specifics of growing Tsiteli Doli
 4. Business planning and marketing



*Photo by: Biological Farming Association Elkana
Harvest*

In addition to the listed activities carried out during the project, farmers were provided with consultations on organic farming during the course of the project. They acquired necessary skills to independently continue growing Tsiteli Doli wheat.

- A seed bank was created with enough material to further expand the area of cultivation and produce enough crops for commercial purposes.
- Contracted by Elkana, Begeli Ltd. purchased a portion of the harvested wheat. This contributed to improvement of socio-economic conditions of the farmers, participating in the project.

- Begeli Ltd. started producing bread in November, 2010. From November 2010 till June, 2011, Tsiteli Doli bread was baked once a week, and sold in the shop Bio Valley. Today the bread is baked daily and can also be found at the restaurant Ar Idardo.
- A documentary on Tsiteli Doli was prepared and uploaded on YouTube and other video-sharing websites.
- In October 2010 and 2011 bread festivals were organized by the Association Elkana on the premises of the History Museum in Akaltsikhe. The purpose of the event was to introduce the wider public to the agro-tourism infrastructure of the region and promote traditional products, among them local wheat varieties. The attendees of the event had a chance to taste and appraise the Tsiteli Doli bread.
- In the framework of an additional award, acknowledging a successful completion of Eco-Awards Program 2009-2011, Elkana purchased additional seeds of Tsiteli Doli, which will later be distributed among farmers residing in Akhaltsikhe (seeds will be handed over to the farmers who were not involved in the project) and Kvemo Kartli with an aim to expand the project coverage. The wheat harvested by so-called new farmers will be purchased by Ltd Begeli for baking bread and later selling it on the market.

Project Duration

June 1, 2009- December 1, 2010

Donors and Partners

The following project was implemented within the framework of the 2009 Eco-Awards Program. Eco-Awards Program is initiated and financed by BP, on behalf of its oil and gas co-venturers (BTC Co. SCP Co.) and administered by Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF).

Contact Information

Biological Farming Association Elkana

16 Gazapkhuli str., Tbilisi, Georgia

Manana Tsulaia

Tel: +995 32 2536485 / Cell: +995 591 19 55 11

E-mail: advocacy@elkana.org.ge

Web-site: <http://www.elkana.org.ge>

