

**CASE 6: KAZAKHSTAN**

# Farmers association spurs development of law on organic agriculture



**GRANTEE**

Republican Public Association of Organic Agriculture



**COUNTRY**

Kazakhstan



**LOCATION**

Kostanai oblast, Kazakhstan



**SGP CONTRIBUTION**

US\$49,470



**IN-CASH CO-FINANCING**

US\$77,900



**IN-KIND CO-FINANCING**

US\$9,720



**START DATE**

September 2012



**END DATE**

October 2016

**PROJECT CONTEXT**

The Kostanai region of Kazakhstan, also known as the Kostanai oblast, is home to Naurzum State Nature Reserve, a part of the UNESCO heritage site Saryarka in Northern Kazakhstan. The reserve protects 3,077 km<sup>2</sup> of steppe, semi-desert, and forest ecosystems distributed in three main areas connected by protected eco-corridors. During the Soviet period between 1920 and 1991, the oblast saw chemical and technological intensification as a result of wheat production. Over time, the intensive agricultural production resulted in soil depletion and mineralization, which is a trend that continues to this day.

In the last 20 to 40 years, the soils of Kazakhstan have lost 8 to 30 percent of their humus. In addition, annual loss of the humus in arable black soils of Northern Kazakhstan is estimated at 0.8-1.0 tons per hectare (Saparov A.S., Faizov K.Sh., Mamutov Zh.U., 2006). Soil depletion has in turn led to more intensive use of mineral fertilizers and pesticides, which has contaminated the soil with alloy compounds, chlorides, and sulphates. Government subsidies covering 50 percent of mineral fertilizer costs have provided perverse incentives and contributed to the sustained and increased use of these chemicals in Kazakhstan. Organic fertilizers receive no such subsidies. In the five years prior to the project inception, the use of mineral fertilizers in Kostanai increased 4.4 times. Crop yield and quality continued to decrease in the oblast, whose main economic sector is agriculture.

**PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION**

In response to the growing interest in organic agriculture among farmers in Kostanai, the Republican Association of Organic Agriculture decided to initiate a demonstration project to show farmers the benefits of organic farming. The project had two objectives, the first was to provide technical support to farmers and to introduce organic fertilizer in agriculture as an alternative to the chemical and synthetic fertilizers currently employed. The second objective was to raise awareness about organic agricultural methods through capacity building and sharing, and media outreach. Overall, the long term vision of the Association was to promote organic agriculture in Kazakhstan.

The project, initially involved six local farmers who were interested in learning about and employing organic agriculture techniques on 200 ha of their croplands each. The farmers had to sign an agreement and pledge to refrain from using mineral fertilizers for the duration of the project. They also had to agree to pay 50 percent of the cost of the organic fertilizer they would be using. The remaining 50 percent



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were provided by the project. This allowed the farmers to overcome some of their scepticism and encouraged them to take ownership of the project.

Two additional farms later joined the project, and these first eight farms became the first in Kostanai to obtain organic certification and are now in the process of transitioning fully to organic farming, bringing the total area of chemical free lands to 14,050 hectares.

## RESULTS AND SCALING UP

Together with SGP and other collaborators, the NGO was able to promote organic farming on eight farms, covering a total of 14,050 hectares of lands. This saves 2,180 tonnes of synthetic fertilizer and 14 tonnes of pesticides used every year. Thanks to organic fertilizer, flax crop yields on these farms have increased by 22.8 percent, sunflower yields by 11.5 percent, wheat by 11.2 percent and lentil crops by 21.6 percent.

As a way to expand the application of the project's results representatives from 50 farms in five oblasts have received consultations and practical advice on organic farming and how to decrease the use of chemicals in their agriculture in order to help them replicate the project. They have also received information on the process of converting to organic farming and the possibilities for organic produce distribution.

To further promote organic agriculture, the Association of Organic Agriculture worked with the Food and Agriculture Organization, the Ministry of Agriculture and other NGOs to draft a law on organic agriculture, with a view to promote enabling government policies to subsidize organic fertilizers, organic farming and organic certification. The Law on Organic Agriculture was signed on November 27, 2015.

## EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNT

The Association of Organic Agriculture's main challenge in implementing the project has been the lack of awareness among farmers and local authorities about organic farming, which contributed to their scepticism about the efficacy of organic farming practices and reluctance to adopt this approach. Conversely, their methods of using chemical and mineral fertilizers had been practiced for generations. Both local authorities and the farmers were also not aware of the potential opportunities accompanying organic produce, such as higher prices, new export possibilities, etcetera. The project's strategy of conducting field visits and demonstrating project results helped to raise awareness and increase the adoption of organic agriculture. However, despite these efforts, the reliance on chemical inputs remains a persistent problem for the agriculture sector and the grantee partner continues to actively disseminate information to new audiences.