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Norman Borlaug Fellowship Program Success Stories in Bulgaria

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Approved By:

Michael Henney, Agricultural Attaché

Prepared By:

Mila Boshnakova, Agricultural Specialist

Report Highlights:

This report features three successful stories of young Bulgarian researchers who participated in the 2011 Norman Borlaug Fellowship Program. Over the last month, Bulgarian fellows hosted two follow up visits by American professors, their mentors during the 2011 fellowship studies. Both visits were very successful, enjoyed strong interest among local researchers and agricultural industry representatives and hold good potential to lead to long-term joint research projects. A third fellow had a hugely successful program on agricultural economic analysis and currently is preparing for a follow up visit in late summer. Two out of three fellows have already prepared grant proposals for joint research projects with their mentors and are actively seeking funding. The Norman Borlaug Fellowship program for Bulgaria is funded through an America for Bulgaria Foundation grant managed by USDA. The fellows are encouraged to continue their cooperation with US host organizations and develop joint projects. AgSofia attended outreach seminars by U.S. professors and visited farms to strengthen FAS relationship with local stakeholders.

**General Information:
Forest Science**

Dr. Elena Rafailova, a junior Ph.D. researcher at the Forestry University in Sofia, spent eight weeks during summer 2011 at Auburn University working with Associate Professor Yaoqi Zhang on various aspects of economic valuation of non-marketed forest resources. In May 2012, Dr. Zhang visited Bulgaria for a week. Elena and her colleagues hosted a seminar at the Forestry University which generated high interest from about 40 faculty members, graduate students, researchers, and specialized media journalists. Dr. Zhang made a presentation titled “Economic Valuation of Non-Marketed Resource and Environmental Services.”

This topic is of high priority for local researchers, educators, and policy makers. It is a new concept for the EU and Bulgaria, which is not well developed, and local knowledge is very limited. Recently passed forestry legislation called for a special regulation/policy towards non-marketed forest resources which will have to be developed in the near future. The government’s Forestry Agency is also keen on developing this regulation but faces a general lack of institutional knowledge, experience, and information, thus needs to rely on international assistance to support its efforts. In this environment the follow-up visit by Dr. Zhang proved very timely and generated strong interest among regulators. In addition to the outreach seminar, Dr. Zhang met with other Bulgarian officials including the Chairman of the Agricultural Academy, and the Rector of the Forestry University; visited the training base of the university as well as local forest sites. “Forest Ideas,” a local research journal plans to publish parts of Dr. Zhang presentation and interview with him. It also extended an invitation to Dr. Zhang to become a member of the Journal’s scientific board. Through the Norman Borlaug Fellowship program Dr. Rafailova gained knowledge that will be widely sought by research associates, regulators and policy makers as they development this new concept in Bulgaria.

Left: A photo from the forestry seminar of Dr. Zhang;

Right: A group photo of Dr. Zhang (right), Dr. Rafailova (Forestry University), Violeta Nedeva (America for Bulgaria Foundation) and Mila Boshnakova (FAS office Sofia)



Plant Protection in Horticulture Studies

Dr. Zvezdomir Jelev, a young researcher from the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, spent eight weeks during summer 2011 at Cornell University working with Professor David Gadoury on Powdery Mildew issues. In May 2012, Prof. Gadoury and Dr. Arne Stensvand, Department Head at the Federal Agricultural Research service in Norway (Bioforsk) visited Bulgaria for a week. Dr. Arne Stensvand worked with Dr. Jelev in 2010 during his study in Norway. Dr. Jelev, a very proactive and dynamic researcher is already working with many farmers applying the knowledge and experiences gained during his fellowship. The two visiting professors made a number of site visits – to Rumelia, a medium-sized vineyard and wine company, to a strawberry farmer near Lozen (Krichim region); to a fruit orchard (Krichim); to the Fruit Growing Research Institute Plovdiv – where new cherry and apple varieties and experimental orchards are being developed; and to small-size cherry farmers in Brestnik, all organized and hosted by Dr. Jelev.

Prof. David Gadoury gave a seminar on “Powdery Mildew in Grape Vine” at the Agricultural University in Plovdiv which attracted more than 80 faculty members, students, and agricultural producers. According to participants, the seminar provided them a new, innovative approach to addressing this economically important disease.

Dr. Jelev has been invited to attend the National Annual Meeting of the American Phyto-pathological Society in Providence RI on 4-8 August. In addition, Dr. Jelev has developed a project proposal to introduce innovative forecasting methods for risk assessment of horticulture diseases. The project goal is to determine optimum application of plant protection chemicals to reduce production cost, protect the environment and to maximize efficiency for farmers. The project will include an experimental field and related extension services for farmers, a service currently lacking at local universities. If funded, the project will be the first pioneer project on this topic in the country. It would have a very positive and significant impact on the country’s entire horticulture and field crops sector. Dr. Jelev developed the project concept in partnership with Cornell University as a direct result of Norman Borlaug Fellowship program.

Left: Group photo from Rumelia winery: Tzveta Kostova (Rumelia owner and manager), Dr. Arne Stensvand (Bioforsk); Dr. David Gadoury (Cornell); Dr. Jelev (Ag University Plovdiv);

Right: A photo from the seminar at the Ag University in Plovdiv

Below: Dr. David Gadoury presents the certificate to Dr. Jelev



Agricultural Economic Analysis

Dr. Bozhidar Ivanov, one of the most recognized young researchers in the area of agricultural economic analysis, is considered one of the top researchers at the Bulgarian Agricultural Economics Institute. In 2011, Dr. Ivanov spent six weeks at the University of Missouri (MU) working with Dr. William Meyers of the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. Dr. Ivanov's study at the University focused on new state-of-the-art methodological and analytical approaches for investigating the agricultural market outlook forecast elaborated by the Food and Agriculture Policy and Research Institute (FAPRI) and USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS). Dr. Ivanov participated in two classes on Agricultural Policy Analysis, practiced applying new methodologies to the Bulgarian production models, and studied U.S. agricultural policy focusing on the Farm Bill while in Missouri. He also visited an organic dairy and cheese farm, agricultural machinery company and irrigation facilities.

Dr. Ivanov attended the USDA Outlook Forum and was impressed by the economic research done at and under the auspices of USDA. He met with key officials and analysts from ERS, USDA's National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS), and FAPRI. Dr. Ivanov hopes to utilize the diverse contacts he made through his program when he establishes a university graduate program in Bulgaria on agricultural and natural resource policy analysis. He plans to do develop the graduate program in

collaboration with the University of Missouri. MU has placed a special flyer outlining Dr. Ivanov's program on the University website.

Upon his return to Bulgaria, Dr. Ivanov made a presentation about his U.S. study at his university and sent a report to the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture does not contain its own analytical unit for economic research and policy analysis and relies heavily on the Agricultural Economics Institute to make all the studies/analysis needed for the government's regulative and policy deliberations. Therefore, international fellowship programs for local researchers are highly appreciated by the Ministry since the knowledge acquired and partnerships developed can be implemented quickly and directly. Dr. Ivanov is preparing to host his mentor in September with an outreach seminar as well as a number of meetings with local researchers, analysts, and officials.