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Newsletter

Empowering Women and Boosting Kosovo's Chestnut Sector

Rural enterprise Freskia, a woman-owned company led by Shkurte Rrustemi, is becoming a leader of change in Kosovo's chestnut sector with the support of the Connecting Natural Values and People (CNVP) Sustainable use of Natural Resources for Environment and Economic Development (SUNREED) project.

Located in the chestnut forest region of western Kosovo, Freskia specializes on the collection, cultivation, processing, and sale of non-wood forest products (NWFPs), with a focus on sustainable practices and supporting local communities.

With guidance from CNVP, Freskia developed a comprehensive business plan and, in October 2024, it launched an initiative to establish a much-needed chestnut collection point with investments in the municipality of Gjakova.

This new facility is a direct boost to the chestnut harvesting process by improving storage, enhancing product quality, and expanding market access for local community, farmers and Private Forestry Owners (PFOs). Freskia has also been able to sign the first contracts with sub-collectors to manage the collection process and strengthen the chestnut value chain.



Nurije Bajrami, relies on her private forest to support her family of seven.

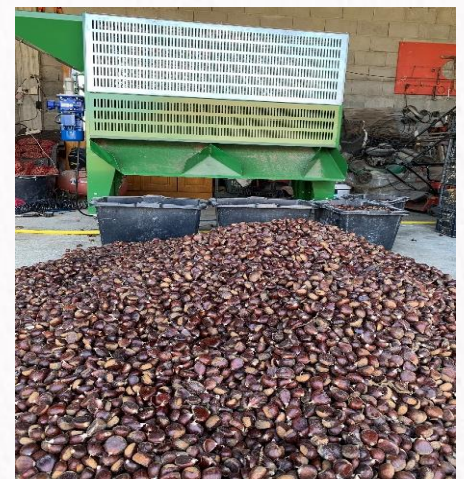
A key part of the initiative has been the close collaboration between Freskia's owner Shkurte and Nurije Bajrami, a private forest owner and widow. Nurije, who lost her husband during the Kosovo conflict, now supports her family of seven through the chestnut forest she owns.

Together, the two women have implemented sustainable practices according to the management plan, including thinning 3 hectares of Nurije's forest to improve its productivity and sustainability.

This silvicultural treatment has improved the chestnut forest, increased the forest's output by generating biomass (forest residues), which has been sold to a leading supplier of wood chip heating systems in Gjakova, contributing to renewable energy production.

The impact of this women-led initiative is multifaceted, yielding positive outcomes across multiple levels. It strengthens Kosovo's chestnut sector, drives local economic growth, improves forestry practices, promotes the use of wood biomass (forest residues) for sustainable energy, and empowers women, reinforcing their roles in forest management and rural economic development.

The broader benefits of this effort extend to the entire community. At least 30 households in the region are expected to see increased incomes by selling more chestnuts at higher prices, with a stable market provided through the collection point.



Collection and selection of chestnuts at the Freskia chestnut collection point.



From Forest to Green Energy

In the forested region of Kamenica, a quiet yet impactful transformation is taking place. Here, the forest serves as a source of green energy, powering homes and reducing carbon emissions.

With the support of CNVP's SUNREED project, the woodchip and pellet production company Feniks-a has partnered with private forest owner Xhemajl Berisha, who owns 4.2 hectares of forest, to promote sustainable forest management and contribute to green energy solutions.

Guided by a carefully prepared management plan, the intervention in Berisha's private forest was designed to enhance the forest's vitality and growth while contributing to Kosovo's transition to renewable energy. The process began with the marking of trees for thinning, which resulted in the thinning of 4.2 hectares of forest and the production of 200 tons of biomass.

This biomass was transported to a collection point established by Feniks-a in Gjakova, where it was processed into woodchips. These woodchips now fuel Gjakova's heating plant, providing warmth to approximately 30% of the city's households and apartments during the cold winter months.

Inspired by the success in Kamenica, Feniks-a continued to expand this model with other private forest owners and farmers by increasing the use of biomass (forest residues) for district heating and promoting sustainable forest management across Kosovo.

CNVP, through its SUNREED project, supports the replication of this initiative to ensure that private forests operate under management plans and achieve sustainable forestry practices throughout Kosovo.

From Wild Apples to Premium Vinegar

The standout local business, Bio Alta, led by its owner Kadrije Mustafa, is more than just a farm – it's a true example of community spirit, driven by



an inspiring woman entrepreneur. Located amidst the mountains and valleys of Kamenica municipality, the business specializes in the cultivation and processing of wild apples.

Since the apple harvest season began in mid-August, Kadrije and her family have gathered more than 5 tons of wild apples from women across five villages around Kamenica. Until now, they have been crafting apple vinegar using traditional methods, but the new equipment they received that has taken their production to the next level.

In March of this year, Bio Alta received new equipment to enhance its wild apple processing. With this upgrade, Kadrije anticipated producing over 4,000 liters of premium apple vinegar in a single season — a goal she recently achieved.



Thanks to the premium quality and now increased volume of vinegar, Kadrije and her family have expanded their sales network across Kosovo, now reaching Fushe Kosove, Vushtrri, Ferizaj, Gjilan and Kamenica. Their online sales have also continued to remain strong.

With this boost, BioAlta is heading toward making an impact in Kamenica and the east Kosovo region, driving community empowerment and creating economic opportunities for local women in this municipality in the east region of Kosovo.



Expanding Local Food Production and Markets

Aferdita Murati, the driving force behind her company Kastrioti, has reached a new milestone in her company's journey, thanks to the partnership with CNVP Kosovo.

Kastrioti, established in 2015, specializes in cultivating and producing juices and jams from forest fruits like aronia, blueberries, and raspberries. With a production capacity of 3,000 liters per year, Kastrioti has long been committed to supporting the local community.

"I'm always looking for new products, opportunities and markets for my business. CNVP has helped us innovate and modernize our production," said Aferdita, following the arrival of her new equipment.

Through support from CNVP's Sustainable Use of Natural Resources for Environment and Economic Development (SUNREED) project, funded by the Swedish Embassy in Prishtina (Sida), Kastrioti has acquired new equipment, including a juice filler, seed separator, and pasteurizing tank.



New processing equipment used for processing of fruit.

This upgrade will enable the company to diversify its product range, adding juices, syrups, jams, and teas made from cranberry, gooseberry, and plum. Kastrioti aims to double its production to 7,000 liters annually.

The expansion will also create new opportunities for local farmers, especially women and marginalized groups, with the goal of increasing the number of collectors by 20-30% and contributing to their economic empowerment.



Additionally, Kastrioti plans to expand its retail reach by partnering with large supermarkets and drugstores across Kosovo.

This milestone represents not only business growth for Kastrioti, but also a commitment to strengthening both the company and the local community.

For more information on the work of CNVP Kosovo and its impact, visit <http://www.cnvp-eu.org/eng/index.php>

