

AKKOR Update

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STARTER FARMERS OF THE LENINGRAD REGION: Three success stories



In August 2015 there was a big farm show in the Leningrad Region of Russia called “AgroRussia – 2015. Three young farmers from the area shared their success stories at the Interregional forum that was a part of AgroRussia – 2015.

The first story “Flower honey” came from a young farmer Mikhail Tsvetkov (in Russian Tsvetkov corresponds to the Russian word “FLOWER”)

Mikhail is a brand new farmer. Only ten months ago he decided to focus on honey production which is very popular in Russia as a delicatessen sweet and a home remedy at the same time. The most challenging part of starting the business was to come up with a convincing business plan which opened the doors for obtaining a grant designed for the beginner farmers. Mikhail confesses that 160-page long document had to prove that the project was viable, that it would be profitable and that it would create one new job for every 500,000 rubles of investment. Mikhail graduated from a Law School, so he came up with a solid business plan. As a result, the size of his grant was impressive, - 1,5 million rubles which amounted to 90% of estimated expenses. The remaining 10% was Mikhail’s personal investment. In April’2015 Mikhail got the first money installment and the rest, as they say, is history.

Says Mikhail: “The volume is pretty modest since April, - 160 kg but in a couple of years I see that number increase to 2 thousand kg a year. My market is mainly St. Petersburg and the demand for locally produced honey is big.

What is interesting is Mikhail's cool reaction to food sanctions that affect the Russian food market. However, in his particular case, his customers are loyal and they like home-grown produce, - honey included. "Of course, fluctuation of the currency market does not make things easier, - they do affect the bottom line. Only 15 % of my equipment is foreign made".

What a funny name for a farm and where it comes from

Cyrill Sheshtanov started his business without government grants or subsidies. The starter capital came from his family. It amounted to 800,000 rubles. He started with just 8 rabbits. One and a half years later he had 200 breeding female rabbits and in five years he is hoping to grow his farm to 9 thousand heads.

Cyrill's farm is called "KROSH" which is a combination of the rabbit in Russian and the first letter of his last name. But the name is "catchy" because it reminds people if a cartoon movie.

"People ask me, - says Cyrill, where I sell rabbit meat. No problem for me. First, I found a niche where I have no competitors. Number two, - I found my exclusive market of customers. They are athletes of all trades. They find rabbit meat lean and very high in protein which is an ideal combination for their diet."

^The current embargo situation did not affect me, said Cyrill, - because my equipment is Russian made. I make rabbit cages by myself, the feed comes from local farms, water and hay are also local, even vaccines are Russian made. So, I feel I am doing well. Of course, it is hard work and I put in long hours but it is worthwhile for me. I moved from St. Petersburg to the rural area and do not regret my decision", - concluded Cyrill.

Growing an exotic vegetable topinambur known as a ground pear.

When Natalia Anushkevich was starting her business, people around her were skeptical and even made jokes about an unusual approach to selecting a vegetable for growing purposes. However, skeptics did not stop Natalia from developing a business plan and submitting it to the contest for the beginner farmer grant.

But Natalia proved every skeptic wrong: not only did she win the grant but was also selected as the most successful project of the year in the category of "The development of innovating biotechnology of industrial processing of ... into pectin and other important food preservers.

Natalia was able to double the acreage of ground pear over the period of three years.

Her farm works in collaboration with companies that produce ecologically clean healthy foods because, among other things, ground pear contains intulin that reduces the amount of blood sugars. Food products developed with using ground pear are in demand among astronauts and in food packages prepared for marines.

Animal feeds that use ground pear as additives, proved to decrease animal deaths in cattle and increase in egg production in geese and milk in dairy.

Natalia works in close collaboration with scientists and uses innovative technologies. For example, Natalia used targeted fertilizer application, the kind of fertilizer to use, its quantity and quality is determined by specially designed programs.

The innovative approach to business brought Natalia not only financial rewards, enough data for a dissertation but also brought her recognition and respect among the peers. For her achievements in ground pear growing, Natalia was named “A Woman Agrarian of 2015”

Pictured is Natalia Anushkevich, a starter farmer from the Leningrad Region