

**AKKOR Letter to Iowa Farmers
April 2017**

AN EDUCATIONAL EXTENSION SUNDAY SCHOOL “ MY LAND” OPENS IN KABARDINO-BALKARIA

Greetings to you, dear Iowa farmers!

When you read the title of our April letter to you, you may ask: “What IS Kabardino-Balkaria? WHERE is it?”

The answer is: Kabardino-Balkaria is a federal region of Russia located in the North Caucasus. The population of the Republic is about 900 thousand people. The region is known for its agriculture and for the fact that highest mountain peak in Russia, - ELBRUS, is located there – 5,642 m (appr, 18,500 ft)



Photo: Initiative group from Kabardino-Balkaria who were successful in securing a federal grant. Speaking is Vera Tilova, is the lead for the project. She is also a regional AKKOR Vice President

Just a couple of months ago the AKKOR branch in Kabardino-Balkaria received some very good news: the won the national competition among NGOs and received a federal grant to launch a program for rural youth called “My Land”.

The idea developed around a Sunday School model only with the emphasis on agricultural information dissemination, learning about the best practices in the area and keeping young people interested in staying and working on the land of their ancestors.

The local AAKOR office was instrumental in developing and presenting the proposal that qualified them for a federal grant.

The idea was simple: set up a training and educational facility on existing successful farms. Two private farms were chosen along with a small ag. (LLC) Company. Young people will be able to see and participate in crops growing, meat and dairy operations.

50 young people have been enrolled in the program. Each Sunday they will have classes on how to organize and manage a farm.

What is also important is that this project will serve as a perfect marketing tool and help to attract more young people to farming. In addition, local AKKOR is going to use some of the funds to for training beginner farmers as well.

March 30, 2017 became a very important date for the project, - after all the preparations and coordination, Sunday school "My Land" opened its doors for participants. The classroom was provided by the local agricultural college. Those in the classroom listened enthusiastically to the introductory presentation about the school's aims and objectives and the program's curriculum.

Vera Tilova (above) and Oksana Chegemokova (an AKKOR chief accountant) shared with the participants their main goals: provide the young people with some theoretical background of management, accounting, coops and then firm up that information by visiting the selected farms and that LLC to get practical farmers' earned experience.

The program also envisions setting up connections with extension services teaching them to share and learn from each other upon graduation.

As we already mentioned, one of the program's goals is to bring more prominence and prestige to being a farmer, improve young people's self confidence in decision making. As well as in making the right decisions for the young families by staying and raising their families in rural areas.

But motivation is only one part of solving the challenge. Another problem is to make sure that the young people get employment with local ag companies, start their own businesses. Crucial will be support of local producers by AKKOR and local governments by creating favorable conditions for marketing and distribution of the farmers' produce.

Another strong feature of this project is that the best leading experts from the region, professors and faculty members of the local University Department of Agriculture, the Regional Center of Innovations, the Center of Social Initiatives and others will be involved in this project.

But hearing about how things should be and seeing what is possible in real farm households are two different things. That is why some successful and steadily developing farm operations were selected to serve as practical implementation grounds.

As we said earlier, a meat operation owned by Andrei Gapkalov and a crop growing farm operated by Alim Khashkuyev were selected for this project.

Our sincere hope is that this pilot project is only the beginning. Over time from one district it will spread to all the corners of Kabardino-Balkaria.

God's speed, My Land!

On that note we close our April letter to you, Iowa farmers! Be well! Best to you and your families

Prepared by Elena Minenko from the materials provided by Vera Tilova