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## PRESS RELEASE

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**BELGRADE** - A conference entitled - Serbian ***Berry Fruit Industry - Time for change?*** - took place today in the premises of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce in Belgrade. The Conference was organized by the USAID Agribusiness Project in collaboration with the Coldstores Association of Serbia and the Serbian Chamber of Commerce.

The event was opened by Mr. Milan Prostran, the General Secretary of the agricultural association of the Serbian Chamber of Commerce; Mr. Louis Faoro, Director of the USAID Agribusiness Project; Kolinda Hrehorović, Advisor for Fruit Production and Processing at the Government of Serbia Ministry of Agriculture, Trade, Forestry and Water Management and Mr. Slobodan Žunić, the President of the Coldstores Association of Serbia.

**Milan Prostran** - *"The annual production of fruit amounts to approximately 1,300,000 tones, yet, it used to be more in the past. The value of production last year came to approximately \$532 million, which is 14.8% less than in 2009."* He also noted that value adding processing is something that is still missing, although Serbia used to be well known for this kind of production in the past. *"This is something foreign investors should take note of as there are opportunities in this sector; however, this should be accompanied with investments in fruit production."*

**Louis Faoro** - *"With the average annual production of raspberry amounting to 85,000 tones, of which 85% is exported, Serbia is the largest exporter of raspberry in the world. It's vital that Serbia maintains this position, however, with no effort, there is no guarantee that that will be so. To maintain and build on its competitiveness, the industry needs to simultaneously work on increasing quality, invest in higher value processing, lower the costs of production and processing, extend the season and put emphasis on marketing and promotion."*

**Kolinda Hrehorovic**, on behalf of the Ministry of Agriculture, Trade, Forestry and Water Management, stated that investments in the fruit sector should be targeted at improving the quality and standards of fruit; introduction of new production technologies; new and improved storage capacities; and the acquisition of new specialized equipment.

**Goran Zivkov** - *Raspberry is Serbia's success, achieved through years of effort by people whom recognized the potential and developed it. The present situation can be put to risk should EU export licenses be lost due to inadequate regulation of pesticide use or in case of new demands from the EU relating to the actual production of fruits, such as integral production."*

The aim of the conference was to gather all relevant representatives of this important agricultural sector so that agreement can be made as to what are the necessary activities that need to be carried out in order to improve the sector's competitiveness in the global markets.

Apart from an analysis of the current state of affairs on the local and foreign berry fruit markets, the results of a detailed analysis of the Russian berry fruit market were presented as well as recommendations for improving the presence of Serbian berry fruit on the Russian market in addition to other relevant markets.

The Conference brought together a large number of representatives of production and processing companies, agribusiness advisory companies, input providers as well as the representatives of educational, scientific, governmental and international institutions.

Since the onset of the USAID Agribusiness Project, various activities have been carried out with the aim to extend berry fruit varieties, insure consistent productivity growth and increase exports of Serbian berry fruit. Some of the activities also include advisory and technical assistance in introducing new varieties; ensuring effective presentation at international trade fairs and shows; networking with buyers and input suppliers; introduction of new technologies and specialized trainings so that companies can improve their marketing, sales and organizational capacities.

USAID Agribusiness Project cooperates with Serbian farmers in all stages of the production cycle throughout the system "from farm to fork", in order to maximize the value of Serbian agricultural products' sales and encourage job creation in agriculture.

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