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SUCCESS STORY

One Organism's Waste Is Another Man's Profit

Marketing Center helps an entrepreneur start an environmentally-friendly business producing biohumus fertilizer



International Rescue Committee photo

*Shabran-D founder
Shohret Mammadov displays his
first batch of biohumus fertilizer*

After numerous failed attempts to grow trees in saline soil near the sea, Shohret Mammadov put down his shovel and put his mind to investigating fertilizer alternatives. He learned that an effective way to fertilize otherwise useless land is by using biohumus fertilizer, which is produced by California red worms. He decided to create a company, Shabran-D, to produce and sell the fertilizer.

Salinization, degradation and erosion of soil are real problems in Azerbaijan. According to studies, Azerbaijan's tillable territory is decreasing by thousands of square kilometers each year, and in many cases, the problem can be solved through appropriate use of fertilizers. Studies supported by the President's State Program on Socio-Economic Development indicate an annual demand for fertilizers in Azerbaijan of 1.8 million tons, but current production meets only 15% of this demand.

Mr. Mammadov recognized that producing biohumus fertilizer could prove to be both environmentally and economically friendly, so he went to the Guba Marketing Center, supported by the International Rescue Committee's USAID-funded ABAD program, for help in launching the enterprise. With the technical support of the Center, Shabran D established a facility and tested its first batch of 70 kilograms of California red worms. When the worms thrived, the marketing center facilitated an ABAD grant to defray the cost of purchasing an additional 500 kilograms of the worms.

The Shabran-D facility is already producing 7.5 tons of biohumus each month. And as the worms grow, so will their production capacity, and production for the first year is expected to reach 2,400 tons, with gross sales reaching \$500,000. This will mean growth in employment opportunities, as well, as Shabran D anticipates increasing its number of workers from six to 20.

In addition to being highly profitable, the local availability of biohumus may help popularize ecologically-sound agriculture in Azerbaijan. "Biohumus is extremely important for eco-friendly farming", Mr. Mammadov says. "It is a zero-waste process; worms convert all types of organic matter, including processed food and manure, into biological fertilizer that can, for example, raise the productivity of green houses by up to 30%".