



Summary

The Agricultural Stevia Cooperative (ASYST) is a new generation cooperative engaged in the cultivation, processing and trade of stevia products (*Stevia sp.*). Stevia is an innovative cultivation that introduces to the food industry a new ingredient, steviol, a substitute for sugar. The cultivation has exceptional prospects and is very promising in terms of replacing (the decreasing in the area) sugar beets and tobacco cultivations. ASYST aims at developing the cultivation and production of high added value products, responding to the increasing interest of consumers for healthy diet, ensuring at the same time the maximum profitability for its members.



Innovative points

ASYST concerns an innovative cultivation, taking its first steps in Greece, and an effort of vertically integrated production aiming at the global market. Through organized, collective efforts, ASYST abandoned the structure of the traditional cooperatives, which has failed and is repulsive to most farmers, and is being built on personal trust relations. The main challenge relates to the attraction of new members in order to strengthen the cooperative and collect the necessary funds for its processing unit. At technical level, the challenge concerned the experimental procedure for the production of steviol glycosides without organic based solvents, which is going to be patented.

Drivers

ASYST is developing under adverse financial circumstances due to the economic crisis in Greece, as a response to the drop/abandonment of traditional cultivations (tobacco, cotton, sugar beet) and the need to replace them with innovative and more profitable ones.

Timeline- Activities and Results

ASYST was founded in December 2012 by professional farmers of the Prefecture of Karditsa. Its membership comprised forty five (45) farmers cultivating from 5 up to 50 ha. Since then, membership has grown and stevia has been cultivated in pilot farms. The coops' processing unit was integrated in the local Leader Programme and funded with 130,000 Euros in June 2014. Its construction started in March 2015, was completed on December 2015 and is expected to start producing soon.

Researchers from Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), professionals who voluntarily help ASYST with legal, accounting and production advice, and ANKA S.A. (the Development Agency of Karditsa, a company of the local authorities and coops) contribute to the project.



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