

NIAB – CEEM Moldova Project: One year on

The NIAB-CEEM Moldova agricultural project is a part of a coordinated plan to provide practical aid and expertise to a small rural community based in Burlacu village in central southern Moldova. We are addressing their quantified needs in terms of education, health & welfare, robust food production and employment, and the agricultural component of the project has been supported financially and practically by NIAB staff, ex-staff and the NIAB Trust for more than 12 months now and the CEEM charity's trustees are very grateful and thankful for all the help we have received.



Without your ongoing help, the project simply would not have achieved what has been done – some of which is mentioned in the briefest of terms here. In particular, the storage facilities of 14/15 Howes Place have been of immense benefit as we have collected, sorted, packed and despatched two 7.5-ton lorries to Burlacu. The most recent was loaded on 25 October and has just arrived; packed with educational aid, sports equipment and warm winter clothes for children and adults. CEEM plans to send these smallish lorries twice a year and has on-going requirements for good educational toys, warm winter clothes (children's 3+ year to adult), blankets and duvets. Contact us at www.ceem.co.uk or john.law57@ntlworld.com if you have aid that we can collect.



Agricultural Project

Following the NIAB – CEEM visit in May 2008, we are still digesting some of the challenges we were shown and analysing priority solutions to address these issues. Practically, we established grass, maize and vegetable 'plots'; distributed 10 NIAB-donated poly-tunnel steel and NIAB-staff-donated polythene to smallholders and growers; and discussed topics and problems relating to crop production, storage and marketing with a range of stakeholders including the mayor, farmers and villagers – gaining a better understanding of the key issues. A local agronomist agreed to act as our local manager of the experiments, which was seen as an essential part of the on-going relationship with the stakeholders.



In summary...

1. The vegetable plots – containing up to 65 varieties – established well and we have received photographic evidence of yield and quality characteristics. In following seasons efforts will be focused on crops that fared best and are of local interest to expand species diversity and marketability. Quantifiable yield and quality determinations may be possible in 2009.

2. The soil tested in the farm field allocated for the experiment was found to be very low in nutrients, and NIAB funded the additional herbicide and fertilizer required. We grew a large-scale nitrogen variety maize trial, focusing on comparing the multi-cobbed local types with the single cob UK variety. This trial established



despite the late drilling (compared to local practice) but had to be concluded prematurely as the earlier-maturing UK variety attracted so much interest from the locals that material was being 'removed'. We harvested and weighed 50 plants per treatment (PIX) and the response to applied nitrogen was in line with expectations.



3. A grass winter-hardiness nursery was sown by the NIAB team in May using 40 grass and clover variety and species mixtures. The aim was to establish sufficient plants so that some knowledge could be gleaned about winter survival, allowing yield trials of the more promising material to be sown in more favourable conditions in 2009. We continued to plant these plots even though they were sown very late compared to best local practice and into far from ideal soil conditions. After a small amount of initial rain – followed by the usual hot dry summer – the plots and the surrounding 1ha cover crop of Lucerne did not establish and the experimental area was effectively abandoned.



Future

1. The next NIAB team visit is planned for March 2009, building on relationships with the farmers and mayor, to sow appropriate maize field experiments and establish herbage plots. The vegetable varieties grown will focus on seed quality issues as well as extending the range of species.

2. Through the generous financial support of the NIAB Trust we are planning to source and supply a mobile soil steam sterilizer, which will be gifted to the mayor of Burlacu as a community resource and will deal in a real and practical way the monoculture pest build-up, particularly in cabbage production grown in poly-tunnels.

3. There are small-business opportunities in terms of crop storage (cabbage and onion initially) with a managed community facility. Crop production to allow suitable storage experimentation will need to be planned and planted.



Related future projects include the provision of piped water for homes and irrigation and stabilising the soil, which is very prone to erosion in flash-flooding, through the planting of 1,000,000 trees, which will additionally help the winter fuel situation in the medium term and provide some fruit production potential.



Please contact
 John Law at CEEM Ltd
john.law57@ntlworld.com
 if you have any questions or would like to help in any way.