



A Tailor-Made US Program for the Meghri Farmers



The training program was designed on Production and Marketing of Subtropical Fruits under the 2015 Cochran Fellowship Program, the participants of which were five fellows from Armenia (producers and processors of Subtropical Fruits). Dr. David Picha, who is the director of LSU AgCenter International Programs and Professor of Horticulture in the LSU AgCenter's School of Plant, Environmental and Soil Sciences, was the lead trainer and he was assisted by the International Programs staff.

The training program followed the objective of increasing the fellows' theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the production of subtropical fruits, orchard management, good agricultural practices, pest management, postharvest technologies and marketing.

The training program consisted of two primary components: the first one was based out of the LSU Campus and involved workshops as well as tours to area producers, research centers and marketing outlets; and the second one was based in Fresno and involved visits to commodity boards, producers, processors, packers and research centers.

Special courses were conducted on commercial fig, persimmon and pomegranate production. Workshops were designed in a form of seminars and discussions and covered the following topics: soil preparation, orchard establishment, propagation, pruning, fertilization, irrigation, pest management, harvesting practices, postharvest care, packing house operations, cold storage, processing and marketing of the above mentioned fruits.

The participants visited LSU AgCenter's Burden Research Center, where they had the opportunity to learn and practically exercise various methods and techniques of pruning and grafting. They learnt new methods of establishment and maintenance of orchards. The group

also visited retail markets and supermarkets as well as became familiar with existing mechanisms of retail and wholesale marketing, packaging of fresh and processed fruits.

Visits were made also several leading companies and production sides in Fresno and Fresno county, CA, including a tour to Fowler Packing Company, a leading Armenian-American table grape and fruit producing company, during which they observed and became familiar with packing house operations, cooling operations for different varieties of fruits, berries, vegetables and nuts.

The group visited several largest nurseries, including Pro Tree Nursery, The Burchell Nursery, and other nurseries where they learned advanced methods and techniques of propagation, stock production, rootstock selection, grafting techniques, selection of resistant and productive varieties of fruit and nut trees as well as berries and grapes.

During the visit to Kingsburg Orchards of apples, peaches, nectarines, Asian pears, apricots, and plums plantations the farmers observed high density fruit tree plantings, discussed orchard management, and tree pruning practices as well as discussed irrigation and fertilization issues, integrated pest management practices with orchards owners. Pest and weed management issues were presented also by the University of California, Kearney Agricultural Center, which followed with a tour to organic and conventional fruit tree plantings. The participants were introduced integrated pest management methods with using pheromone and other types of traps with consideration of characteristics of existing pest species, climatic and other ambient conditions and an example of PPP for integrated pest management.

All participants were very excited and enthusiastic during the whole study. After the program they decided to increase the number of more resistant early and late growing pomegranate and fig varieties in order to have production for a longer period, better quality and quantities for consistent supplies of high quality fruits that are required for market sustainability. They all will undertake one touch harvesting method that prolongs the shelf life of the production. All the production sites and plantations visited by the fellows were equipped with the best modern technologies and had an excellent marketing strategies, but as the production volumes of the fellows is very small for such huge investments, the fellows understood the importance of joint cooperation and will later think of combining their efforts for postharvest care, packinghouse operations and marketing.