

Library helps increase farmers' income

Public Library 'Radislav Nikcevic', Serbia

Many years ago, libraries were an important part of social and cultural life in Serbian villages. But with conflict, followed by economic recession, investment in rural areas declined. Village libraries could not afford new books and only dust gathered on their shelves. Meanwhile, businesses in towns and cities were adjusting to the era of the internet, and e-commerce was starting to flourish. But farmers had limited internet access. Public Library 'Radislav Nikcevic' in Jagodina municipality supervises 16 libraries, but many were libraries in name only. The question librarians asked themselves was – how can we revitalize our rural libraries and serve farmers? The answer led to the creation of the AgroLib-Ja project.

Reconnecting farmers to their libraries

Agro-Lib-Ja brings information and communication technology (ICT) to the villages where the farmers live. It connects farmers to the government's agricultural agencies and to other sources of support. With support from EIFL-PLIP (US\$30,000) the library bought computers, installed them in four village libraries, connected them to the internet and invited farmers to learn ICT skills. They created an online farm produce market and encouraged farmers to sell products over the internet. They teamed up with the agricultural agencies and hosted a series of lectures by agricultural experts. They increased their stocks of books and journals on agricultural topics.

Achievements and impact

- Public Library 'Radislav Nikcevic' has revitalized four village libraries, in Bunar, Bagrdan, Glavinci and Glogovac.
- Farmers are flocking to the libraries. Librarians recorded 1,175 visits by farmers to use the Internet; 1,249 visits to hear lectures; 1,655 visits to use agricultural literature, and 6,158 hits on the AgroLib website.
- The website - www.agrolib.rs – provides automatic weather updates, news for farmers and digitized magazines and books. It includes an online produce market - www.agrolib.rs/pijaca.
- The number of visitors to the village libraries rose from 16 a week before AgroLib-Ja to 176 a week at the end of the project's first year.
- Average computer use rose steadily – from 36.5% of full capacity midway through AgroLib-Ja to 59.3% towards the end of the project's first year.



Dairy farmer, Mr Dejan Stankovic, says AgroLib-Ja has helped him sell more produce.

What the farmers say

According to Public Library 'Radislav Nikcevic's' survey:

- 85% of farmers said they found information of value to their farming on the Internet
- 95% said they believed the Internet was a good way of bringing people together.
- 100% said they Internet was a good place to market and sell farm produce.

'They [AgroLib team] taught me how to make a profile on the AgroLib market, and I have now come across a lot of agricultural forums. I was very surprised when people who saw me on the internet started getting in touch with me. I also found new customers. I think that the internet is a good way of associating farmers and a good way of exchanging experiences.' - Mr Dejan Stankovic, dairy farmer.

'After we advertized on the internet the number of people who are interested in our bee products and our bee swarms has increased.' - Mr Milija Brakovic, treasurer of the Beekeepers' Association.

'On the very first day that I opened a profile on the AgroLib market... I managed to sell part of my production – 1,500kg of quince! Through the contacts I think I will easily sell out the entire crop next time!' - Mr Zoran Milosevic, fruit farmer.

What the partners say

'It is of great importance that in each community there is a place where people gather, exchange information and learn. Such centres should be libraries.' - Bojana Dimitrijevic, Deputy of the Town Assembly (Jagodina).

The future

The Ministry of Culture has agreed to fund internet connections, and the Jagodina municipality will continue to fund the librarians' salaries and to provide books, other resources and support. The library's other partners continue to support the project, providing expertise and organizing professional lectures. AgroLib-Ja is here to stay!

EIFL-PLIP supported the service in May 2010. A year later, the library assessed the impact of the service.

Information presented here is based on the library's assessment.

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EIFL (Electronic Information for Libraries) is an international not-for-profit organisation dedicated to enabling access to knowledge through libraries in more than 60 developing and transition countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. EIFL's Public Library Innovation Programme (EIFL-PLIP) supports public libraries to use ICT to implement innovative community development services. Learn more - www.eifl.net/plip; further information - plip@eifl.net.

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