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Cultivating the Grain and Living Life in the Countryside

Kyiv, 13 June 2002 – The UNDP Agriculture for Human Development Project organized a field visit to the Kagarlyk raion in Kyiv Oblast, with invitees including representatives from foreign embassies and development organizations, the bulk of whom are in fact potential donors, and local government representatives. The focus of the visit was to observe the changes resulting from the joint effort of the Ukrainian Government and international community in the domain of agricultural reform. Among the participants were Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine Mr. Leonid Kozachenko and Vice Governor of the Kyiv Oblast, Mr. Ivan Bidziura.

The tour first stopped at the Kagma Milk Factory, established on the basis of the Kagarlyk butter-dairy in June 1993 by the work collective. During the visit, workers at the factory demonstrated a healthy and busy work ethic, producing 35 types of dairy products including sour cream, yoghurt, milk, butter, cream, and others, being packaged in small containers with brand labels and shipped to over 100 shops in and around Kyiv, Cherkassy, and Bila Tserkva. 13% of the produce is sold locally. At present, the factory is constantly modernizing its equipment to meet European produce quality and safety standards. It remains one of the most profitable enterprises in the raion.

The group was then taken to an agricultural cooperative called “Agrofirm Peremoga”, in Burty village, where there is a large and healthy annual crop production since its establishment in February of 2000, including thousands of livestock as well as vast fields of wheat, maize, buckwheat, and other agricultural products which provide the income for 453 people in the cooperative.

In Burty village, stops were made to the local boarding school and church, where donors were welcomed by local Ukrainian musicians and church choirs, surrounded by curious onlookers who welcomed them with traditional Ukrainian warmth and hospitality. A tour of the boarding house for girls and boys aged 6-16 was emotional for some donors, where they saw a stuffed animal with “Take Me Home” emblazoned on its front. The group was then taken to the private peasant farm of Mr. Vasyl Khrystuk. This was an uplifting moment after the group was visibly moved by the tour of the facilities of Burty village.

Mr. Khrystuk was more than willing to answer a few questions. “I love it here – it provides jobs for me and my family,” he said about his farm, which employs no hired workers but rather is maintained entirely by Mr. Khrystuk’s extended family, who also make time to help other farmers with field work or other activities. “I’ve got no problems – in fact, I invite you all to join me here!” he voiced emphatically to the donors, beaming over the 14 hectares of green fields behind him.

After lunch, the tour then paid a visit to the private farm “Lidia”, which was established in 1995 after a couple from Kyiv returned from travelling in Africa, and decided as their next step in life to start up a small agricultural business rather than return to Kyiv. The

entrepreneurial spirit of this couple resulted in the cultivation of 84.5 hectares of land, plus livestock. The farm provides the entire income for the village of 180 households.

“This is a wonderful opportunity to put a human face on agricultural policy in Ukraine,” remarked Mr. Douglas Gardner, UNDP Resident Representative, who was also among the group. “We have seen with our own eyes the child in the choir and the farmer in the field, and feel privileged to visit their home surroundings, and have been impacted so by this visit that when we return to Kyiv we can use this as inspiration in the work that we do in our offices.” He added that the spirit of the team was a result of being able to come face to face with the beneficiaries of UNDP’s work, as well as being able to escape the city’s metropolitan landscape and into Ukraine’s beautiful countryside.

The group returned to Kyiv’s urban enclaves in late afternoon, refreshed and tired from the fresh air, and easily able to understand the special relationship that Ukrainian farmers and rural peoples had with their land, and why so many of them refused to consider the option of moving to Kyiv. Simply put, life in the fields was far more comfortable and satisfying for them – despite the current economic environment, the farmers and small business entrepreneurs in the area stuck to what they knew and what they did best, which was cultivating the grain and bringing it to market, and in turn developing and sustaining the local economy through their efforts.