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### **Kosovo: An Exchange Between Students, Countries, and Agriculture**

Kosovo. A Sister-State to the state that is an agriculture giant in the United States, and a country whose agriculture industry is years behind much of the rest of the world. Kosovo is a very young country that may not look like the typical country that struggles with food insecurity, but it struggles nevertheless. An agricultural exchange program could not only help improve the agriculture industry within the country, but also provide a solution to this problem.

Even as Iowa's sister-state, Kosovo is not a very well known country, and this may be due to its small size and young age. Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008 and is currently recognized by most members of the United Nations (Antonia et al.). The young country made its government a parliamentary republic ("Kosovo"). The war that gave this country its freedom also had many other impacts. There was a sharp decline in the population around 1997. Much of the older population was killed and left behind was a majority of young people. Today the median age of Kosovo is 30.5 and the population is 1.9 million ("Kosovo"). While only 38.3% of the population lives in urban areas, 61.7% of the population lives in rural areas. Iowa and Kosovo share a special relationship through the status of being sister-states. This is because of their many similarities, but what makes the relationship even more special is all of the ways that the state and country are different. Iowa is 55,857 square miles ("Iowa"), and Kosovo is 10,887 square miles ("Kosovo"). Just under 52.8% of Kosovo's land is cultivated. While most of the farms are family plots for subsistence farming, these farms mainly grow wheat, corn, berries, potatoes, peppers, and fruit (Antonia et al. and "Kosovo"). Major exports also include metal products, scrap metals, leather products, machinery, and appliances ("Kosovo"). The climate is one aspect of Kosovo that may be considered very similar to its sister-state. Antonia et al. says that it has a "moderate continental climate." Summers are warm with high temperatures in the 80s. Winters bring low temperatures and quite a bit of snow ("Antonia et al."). The geography of this country on the other hand, brings a more interesting aspect. The southeast border contains the Sharr Mountains, and the southwest border is also rocky and mountainous. The North is where you will find the Kopaonik Mountains. This country flattens out towards the central regions with mostly hills and two wide plains that span out to the east and west sides of the country ("Geography").

Many aspects of daily life in Kosovo are similar to what many people experience in the United States. Kosovo has access to many of the same amenities that those in the United States do, but the country is overall many years behind the United States and some aspects of what citizens in the US might consider daily needs might be a little different for those who have grown up in this country. While the average family size is slightly higher at 5.8 people, it is the homes that provide the biggest difference when it comes to family life (Bauer). Most of the homes in Kosovo contain extended family and are quite tall (Antonia et al.). Instead of a big area outside the back of their homes filled with grass, they have small cement patios that are enclosed in a fence (Antonia et al.). Families in Kosovo get their food from the grocery store, markets, or possibly their own garden. They use relatively the same cooking appliances that we use to cook this food unless they are cooking a specific cultural meal such as Flija. Flija is cooked in a very large round pan outside on an open fire. While there are a wide range of jobs available in Kosovo, jobs in the service industry are the most popular. The most common jobs are in public service, small businesses, construction, manufacturing, and mining (Antonia et al.). While 78.2% work in service, 17.4% of those employed work in industry, and only 4.4% of employed work in agriculture (*Central*). The average wage is 25,108 EUR ("Kosovo... Survey"). Similar to the United States, Kosovo provides free education in public schools from preschool up until high school (Pupovci). In fact, school is

mandatory up until the age of 16 (“Education”). Quality healthcare on the other hand is not as easily accessible. Public health care is affordable and easy to access but many of the public clinics do not have enough supplies and are not taken care of very well (Antonia et al.). Private health care is very good, but also very expensive (Antonia et al.) There is very good access to basic things such as clean water, toilets, electricity, telephones, roads, and local markets, but there are still improvements that can be made. The majority of the population, 84%, has access to clean water and 100% has access to electricity (*Danube* and “Access”). There is also access to telephones for a relatively inexpensive cost for those who live in Kosovo (“Kosovo... Travel”). One fact that might surprise you about Kosovo is that while they have access to toilets, there is no toilet paper in any public schools because the government chooses not to pay for it. Along with being relatively far behind much of the modern countries, there will always be problems to address for those who are unemployed or can not afford to buy food. Kosovo has made a lot of progress within the past twelve years, but it still has a lot more progress to make.

The status of agriculture and education within Kosovo is not quite black and white. While the overall education system still has progress to make, it is doing well. Arta Sertolli is the senior officer for agro-processing and marketing within the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Development. Sertolli says that there are currently six high schools for agriculture and one main college institute for agriculture in the capital of Prishtina while there are several more programs and smaller colleges around the country. Agriculture on the other hand still has many advances to make as it is still many years behind much of modern agriculture and farming. The reality is that agriculture is not an industry that many people in Kosovo want to go into. Despite the fact that the history of agriculture in Kosovo is quite extensive, the agriculture industry is struggling and has forced the country to import most of its agricultural goods (“Kosovo... Sector”). What is very promising about Kosovo is that both education and agriculture are improving, even though education is moving at a much faster pace. There are many factors that contribute to the agriculture industry being where it is today. The biggest factor to consider is the culture. The attitude towards agriculture has developed into one that mostly views the industry as a last resort option. Many people assume that the jobs in agriculture only consist of manual labor jobs on a small farm, and do not know that agriculture includes so much more. This trend developed after the industry collapsed following the war (Tetra). This attitude has affected both rural and urban populations. Many people in rural populations are born into small subsistence farms that still use many traditional practices. Those who are part of the urban population on the other hand have a very difficult time getting into farming because they were not born on a farm. Many people are also discouraged from even attempting to enter the industry because of the view about it.

Many of the questions and problems surrounding hunger are being addressed and worked towards solving everyday by many different people. One example of a way that struggles with education and agriculture could be combated is with a training facility within Kosovo. This facility would be a place where students, farmers, and experts can all come to learn and work together. It could almost be considered a conference center for all people involved in agriculture in the region. Within the facility would be land, space, and equipment so that people from the region could come to run a greenhouse, share techniques, and learn. This has the potential to be an amazing program that brings people together and provides a place for great agriculture advances in the area to be made. This same facility could also tie into another possible solution to improve agriculture and reduce hunger within the country of Kosovo.

In order to solve hunger within the country of Kosovo, both education and agriculture must be addressed and brought together. Another possible solution could be within an agriculture exchange program between Iowa and Kosovo. The resources for farmers and agriculture students to expand their knowledge beyond where they are currently at within the country is limited in both Iowa and Kosovo. Although both Kosovo and Iowa have many agricultural resources, there is only so much that you can learn within your own area of the world. An exchange program between students of completely different parts of the world would give both groups of students a completely different perspective on agriculture. It would also

provide them with ideas that they have never even heard or thought of because it is not practiced or taught within the area that they live. The general idea of the program would be that students from Iowa would travel to Kosovo and be paired up with students in similar areas of study. While in Kosovo they would work together to address an issue within their community, and learn from each other. Some examples of issues that could be addressed are the efficiency and productivity on farms as well as the way they process, distribute, and market that food. They may also be able to work with the Department of Advisory Services for Agriculture and Rural development. In order to do this they will visit many different places while in Kosovo. Some of these places would be the agriculture school in Prishtina, a training facility in the region, and multiple farms to see what agriculture is like within the country. Another part of this exchange would also include going to an elementary level school to speak with young kids about agriculture, and do a small activity with them. This is an essential part of the exchange because it also helps combat one of the cultural challenges in Kosovo. As previously stated, one of the biggest challenges within the country is the fact that agriculture is not seen as a profitable industry, and is actually considered a last resort option.

Now Iowa students traveling to Kosovo would be only half of the program. The next half is very similar, but will include both the Iowa and Kosovo students traveling to Iowa to do many similar activities together once again. While in Iowa they will visit multiple farms where they will learn about farming practices in the state. They will also visit an agriculture college and possibly the Global Agriculture Learning Center in order to learn more about the agriculture industry. The last very important place they will visit once again is another elementary school. This is so that they can once again do an activity with the students. They will continue to work together and learn from each other as they address an agriculture issue, but this time the issue will be centered around Iowa agriculture. The issue that they address will greatly depend on what each of the students' majors are and what they are interested in. They may also be able to work with a local Farm Bureau or extension office. This is one of the most important parts of the exchange, and provides one of the most important opportunities for students to learn from each other and work together. It is also a vital piece because in order for the project to be sustainable and receive funding, it is necessary to prove that these students are gaining knowledge and skills that they can bring back to help improve agriculture within each of their communities.

There are a large amount of resources needed for a program such as this to be successful. There needs to be leaders and organizations who are willing to run this program, access to facilities that students can go to and learn, farmers who are willing to host students on their farm, and quite a bit of money to fund it. There will be many people and organizations that will need to work together to make this project a reality. In order for the program to stay functioning smoothly and well, there would need to be both an organization and specific leader from each country that helped run the program. In Iowa, the project would begin in Fort Dodge, IA with the help of many people including Terry Moehnke, and organizations such as a neighboring FFA program or Iowa Central Community College. Organizations within both Iowa and Kosovo will play a huge role in hosting the exchange. In Kosovo, a program called TOKA, the Department of Advisory Services for Agriculture and Rural Development, or the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine of the Universities of Prishtina could also possibly be involved. There are many possibilities for the future of the program as well if it was a success. As the program expands and continues to progress, other colleges and organizations could possibly become involved as well. Another possibility would be for the exchange to expand to involve farmers from each country. Funding for this program is another huge challenge within this project, and will need to be addressed in multiple ways. Federal grants from both Iowa and Kosovo could be a huge assistance. A Taste of Kosovo event has raised a large amount of funds for a youth exchange with highschool Students between Iowa and Kosovo in past years, and could also be a very large fundraising event for this project. Costs could also be cut through the incorporation of the training facility, but funds would still possibly need to come from a local farm bureau, college, and more fundraising events. This exchange could not only be a solution to hunger within the country, but also improve the agricultural industry as well.

The involvement of students within this program would be taken very seriously, and because of that there will be certain requirements that students must fulfill throughout the entire process. The only requirements in order to apply for this program would be that you must speak English, currently be in an agriculture program through a university, intend to stay in an agriculture program, and intend to pursue a career in agriculture. The requirement to speak English would be essential to address language barriers so that the students would be able to work together. Some questions within the application would ask for their major, age, what career they want to pursue, what they want to gain from this program, why they want to be part of the program, and how they think being part of this program would benefit them in the future. The application will also require applicants to submit a video explaining why they want to be part of the program, and agreeing to fully participate in the entirety of the program which would include meetings beforehand, the trip, hosting students in their home country, and certain requirements after the trip. The meetings that would take place before the trip would be solely to provide an education to students about the other area's culture. The meetings will strongly be centered around the idea of respect and open mindedness for those who are different from you. These meetings will also briefly outline the agriculture industry within the other state or country. The next requirement would seem fairly obvious. It is to participate in both the traveling to the other country or state, and hosting within your own country or state. Although that is the biggest part of the program, there will still be certain requirements after the trip. One of the most significant requirements is to write a paper that essentially sums up what they have learned. The paper will need to encompass each of the solutions they helped develop for each country. They will show that they learned a significant amount of information within the program and they must include how they plan to incorporate the information learned into their own communities, while showing that they equally contributed to a solution in the other country or state. This paper is extremely important to help prove that this program provides students with a vast amount of knowledge that they will be able to use in the future to better their communities. It is important to attempt to prove this in some way so that certain companies, schools, groups, and programs can see a reason that they should continue to invest in a program like this. Other requirements would include giving presentations about the program to those who helped fund and support it.

This small country in the Balkan region has already been through many challenges in its short time of being a country. The next challenge that is being tackled is improving the agriculture industry within the country, and one way to do this is through an agriculture exchange program with Iowa.

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