

Monicol



Owner of Monicol,
Mr Dumitru Vicol

Moldova has favourable climatic and soil conditions for the production of walnuts. The walnut sector has become one of the leading export sectors of Moldova. Monicol is the number one company in Moldova when it comes to dried fruits and walnuts. Monicol is producing and exporting walnut kernels and dried fruits and is located at 15km from Chisinau. Owner of the company is Mr Dumitru Vicol. In November 2011 Mr Vicol visited the Netherlands with a Moldovan delegation to participate with a trade mission. The DMBC visited his company in October and Mr Vicol gave a tour through the processing factory. The DMBC was interested in how things are going now with the plant and his experiences dealing with Dutch companies.

Several factors contributed to the developments of the walnut sector in Moldova; the presence of a low cost labor force to manually extract a high rate of value added unbroken kernels, preferential access to the EU market with no tariff duties and emergence of exporters that were quick in organizing processing activities in compliance with international quality and safety standards. Many parts of Moldova are ideally suited to the growing of walnuts. Compared with other countries, Moldovan walnuts have unique advantages in terms of quality due to fewer pests and disease, clean air and water, and a reduced threat from the urbanization of agricultural land. Only 6-7% of the soil in the world is good for walnut trees. In Moldova, 70% of the soil is productive for the trees.

Mr Vicol told that Monicol SRL has been established in 2001 and the operational process started in 2002. "In the beginning we started as a small company, just founded. The main activity became processing and export of walnut kernels." Monicol is selling to several countries in Europe. In 2004 the company started to produce dry fruits: prunes, apples and sour cherries. "Step by step we improved our quality. We bought and reconstructed this factory in 2004, because the other plant was old and not functional anymore. We were supported by the USAID with \$200.000 for the machinery. In 2006 we got the ISO 9001:2000 and HACCP certification. Before the certification, diesel was being used for the machines, but that was expensive and not efficient." After Monicol obtained the certifications it was getting more focussed on the retail market. 95% of the walnuts and dried fruits is being exported, 85% to the European market and 10% to Belarus and Baltic countries. The other 5% on the local market as Fruit2go (dried fruits). This is being made for the biggest supermarkets in Moldova, like for instance Metro.

In 2012 €100.000 has been invested in the reconstruction of the walnut facility and €300.000 in machinery. The reconstruction was needed for safe processing and efficiency increasing; both energy and human resources. "Those investments should help to keep penetrating the market and to stay on the market, to maintain what you have."



The factory



Mr Vicol gave a tour through the processing factory of about 4800m², which is located in the middle of a beautiful green landscape in the village of Nimoreni, just outside Chisinau. During the tour, Mr Vicol did not only show the fascinating process from harvesting the walnuts in September till its final destination, the consumer. He also shared his knowledge about the walnut, which is impressive. To each question about the history, production, medical benefits, the types of walnuts, the best conditions for a walnut Mr Vicol gave a dedicated answer to that.



What you will notice when you walk through the production facilities is the well-arranged structure, modern machinery and equipment. The process of the walnuts is done manually, which assures higher quality. During the selection process all foreign bodies are eliminated and homogeneous fractions are packed separately. For the selection process Monicol acquired the new production line Sortex E of Bühler. The Sortex machines are acquired for sorting the walnut kernels and ensuring a high product quality and to satisfy the current hygiene requirements. The final inspection is done manually.

During the season 300-350 persons are employed for the production process and they have a team of 100 experienced and highly trained specialists.

Beside the [several types of walnut kernels](#), Monicol is also producing dried and fresh fruits.

“The process of the walnuts is done manually, which assure high quality”



Production facility Monicol



Future of Monicol

Despite the financial crisis that is going on almost everywhere around the world Mr Vicol sees opportunities. “Of course it is now a more difficult time than before, because of the financial crisis. Our main goal is to keep our position and when possible to increase our market share. We increased our sales of walnut kernels in 2011 with 53% over 2010. A crisis is a time for challenges. We have the ambition to increase our quantities and to pack for more small countries, like Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Romania.”

Trade mission to the Netherlands

Last year Monicol participated on a trade mission to the Netherlands, which was organised by the Match Making Facility of the NL Agency.



Walnuts ready for export to Germany, The Netherlands, Austria, UK, Switzerland and Scandinavian countries

How did you experience the trade mission to the Netherlands last year?

“That was successful. The Match Making Facility of the NL Agency helped us. The events were organised very well and the meetings with potential buyers were perfectly arranged and we felt us really welcome. The cooperation with Dutch people/investors is still good. Before the trip we had three or four Dutch customers and now we have more than eight. 8% of the total volume was exported to the Netherlands. In 2012 it is 12%. You can imagine that we are satisfied with the result.”

Why did you want to participate in the trade mission?

“We are a member of the European Business Association Moldova. The EBA invited us and provided us information about the Match Making Facility and why the Netherlands is such an interesting country for doing business. It has a good market, investment climate, logistics etc. We were introduced to several Dutch companies which was organised very well.”

“After the trade mission it was a target for us to present ourselves in the Netherlands. Our products are not easy to get in the Netherlands, but we get a lot more demands from the Netherlands. We experienced the cooperation with Dutch companies as pleasant.”

How was the welcome in the Netherlands?

“Mr Terwel of the DMBC had arranged potential buyers and investors. Before we started with our journey through the Netherlands we were enlightened which potential investors we were going to visit. Monicol was interested to buy machines. Because of the MMF we have made new and worthy connections and it is for us to decide if we buy the machines we have seen. The good thing is that we know the possibilities and that we have them.”

Would you advise other Moldovan companies to participate on a trade mission to the Netherlands?

“Yes. It was a good business experience for us to visit the Netherlands. The country has an international trading mentality and many connections with countries through the whole world. The Dutch culture of trading and negotiating is well –known. Moldovan companies are wasting opportunities to promote themselves in the field of agriculture. Think of the Moldovan wine, fruits and grapes.”

Why should Dutch companies invest in Moldova?

“There are a lot of opportunities and benefits to do business in and with Moldova. The potential is not being used sufficiently. Investors from for instance Western Europe have a lack of information about the benefits of the investing climate in Moldova.”

“Moldova is geographically situated in the centre of Europe. This creates a bridge to Asia, former Soviet countries and Western Europe. Previously Moldova was called the garden of the Soviet-Union, because of all the growing fruits, vegetables and wine fields. This has arisen, because of the good climate, the soil, good people and the knowledge in the food industry. This is interesting for investors. The land and labour is cheap. More than 30% of the suitable land in Moldova is not being used.”



Fruit2go, dried fruits

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