



### Equipping Cheese Factory with New Production-line in Akhalkalaki

Cheese production in one of the most developing fields in Akhalkalaki. Local producers manufacture sulguni (sold immediately), ham – requires two months of maturation and Georgian factory cheese – requires four months of ripening. Legally registered manufacturers with HACCP standards pay taxes and are controlled by the National Food Agency. Making cheese at home is not prohibited but this kind of production is beyond control. As a rule, milk powder is used for home production and, consequently, the price is quite low and this creates an unfair completion on the market.

Karen Simonyan is the Director of the Cheese Factory located in Akhalkalaki. The main aim of his company is to produce high-quality cheese. The company buys milk from the farmers of the villages of Okami and Olaverdi in the Akhalkalaki Municipality. Sometimes, due to the high milk yields, the volume of milk exceeds ten tons. The factory obtained not only the HACCP certificate but also the permission to put “Georgian Milk” on their product as a symbol of Original Georgian Quality.



Employees: 4 locals  
Total budget of the project: GEL 119,036.70  
EU share: GEL 68,603.00  
Co-financing: GEL 50,433.70

Producing high quality products requires a lot of effort and financial resources. Karen Simonyan initially looked towards banks for investment. With the announcement of the EU grant competition, he applied and was successful. He extended his factory’s production and employed five more people. “We are constructing a building with the grant amount which complies with all of the conditions for cheese making, ripening and packing. A new production-line has been developed and enables us to produce Georgian and European cheese,” said Mr Simonyan who also expressed his gratitude to the Akhalkalaki LAG and GIPA for the financial support of his and other projects aiming at regional development.





Within the project, the factory procured two distribution cars and a pasteurizer. Cheese is sold within the whole of Georgia and the number of clients increases regularly. Customers are becoming more and more informed about the products they are purchasing and so they pay attention to the package and the labeling. Karen Simonyan intends to expand his business in response to the increased demand for his products and this will promote regional economic development and an improvement of the socio-economic conditions for the local population. It should also be mentioned that Mr Simonyan has been taking care of local people during the pandemic he gave cheese to vulnerable families without any charge. This highlights the development of responsible business in Georgia.

*The initiative has been financed by the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) through the project of promoting new approaches in Rural Development in Akhalkhalaki.*

*Project is being implemented by the Department of Rural Development and Vocational Education (DRDVE) of the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA). Project Partners are Mercy Corps, Elva - Community Engagement and West Cork Development Partnership.*

*The European Union supports agriculture and rural development of Georgia through the programme of ENPARD, which has been implemented in Georgia since 2013. The total budget is 179.5 mio EUR. The main goal of the ENPARD is to reduce the rural poverty. The main priority of the first phase of the program was to support agricultural development, whereas the main aim of the second and third phases is to promote economic opportunities and capacity building of people living in the rural areas. For the additional information, please follow the link: [www.enpard.ge](http://www.enpard.ge)*