

# **Donau Soja-ADA Strategic Partnership 2017-2024**

Final Report

February 2024

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## FOREWORD

In presenting this final Strategic Partnership report, we extend our sincere appreciation to ADA for their visionary recognition of the Donau Soja Organisation as a catalyst for development and a vital bridge between the non-EU and EU value chains. The Strategic Partnership collaboration has been instrumental in elevating sustainable, non-GM soya production and a cornerstone for supply and value chain development in Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has empowered individuals at every level of the value chain, providing agency and opportunities that have contributed to enhanced economic development and poverty reduction in local communities.

The collaboration between ADA and Donau Soja has not only contributed to transformations in more sustainable local and European soya value chains but has also contributed to an impact on the global stage. It has consistently played a role in shaping the European protein landscape, one that supports small farmers, consumers, and businesses, creates jobs and integrates European agricultural and food value chains. By doing so, it contributed to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.



May this report serve as a testament to the transformative power of Strategic Partnership in fostering sustainable development. The journey chronicled herein stands as an inspiring model for future projects, demonstrating the positive outcomes that emerge when organizations unite in a shared commitment to a better, more sustainable world.

**Matthias Krön**

President and Chairmen of Donau Soja

## PROJECT SYNOPSIS

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Building sustainable, inclusive, and well-functioning value chains for Non-GM soya and organic soya in Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina</b> |   |
| <b>ADA Contract Number</b>  | 2530-00/2017  |
| <b>Implementer</b>  | Donau Soja GmbH                                     |
| <b>Start</b>  | January 2017  |
| <b>End</b>  | February 2024                                       |
| <b>Implementation period</b>  | 86 months   |
| <b>Reporting period</b>   | Final report 2017-2024                              |
| <b>ADA co-financing contribution</b>  | 4,499,150 EUR                                       |
| <b>Donau Soja contribution</b>  | 4,499,150 EUR                                       |
| <b>Target country(is) and region(s)</b>   | Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| <b>Reported to</b>  | Austrian Development Agency                         |
| <b>Reported from</b>  | Donau Soja GmbH                                     |

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Project objective</b>              | The overall objective of the programme was to build sustainable, inclusive, and well-functioning value chains (local, regional, and international) for non-genetically modified (non-GM) soya and organic soya in the target countries.   |
| <b>Agreed &amp; achieved outcomes</b> | Competitiveness of agricultural producers, processors, food and feed industry was enhanced in each target country.<br>Access to (domestic and international) markets was improved and value to non-GMO products was added.  |
| <b>Outputs countries</b>              | <p><b>Component 1: Production and processing</b><br/>Product quality and quantity have been improved.<br/>Best practices for soya production have been promoted.<br/>Access to inputs has been improved.<br/>Organic soya production as an attractive market niche has been promoted.</p> <p><b>Component 2: Value chain development</b><br/>Linkages and networks among all value chain participants have been created.<br/>Market for sustainably produced non-GM products has been developed.</p> <p><b>Component 3: Awareness raising and sensitization</b><br/>Information about Donau Soja values, Strategic Partnership, local production, nutrition, food safety, and environmental aspects of agriculture and food production have been disseminated.</p> <p><b>Component 4: Labelling and certification</b><br/>Sound frameworks for certification bodies, qualified experts and testing facilities have been set up, to guarantee product quality and build the basis for accessing markets. Local stakeholders were supported in certification process.</p> <p><b>Component 5: Business environment and policy framework</b><br/>Contribution has been given to creation of a conducive and effective business environment and policy frameworks, including support mechanisms and regulations for soya production and trade.</p> |
| <b>Outputs International</b>          | <p><b>Component 6: International market development and public awareness</b><br/>Participants from South Eastern and Eastern Europe have been matched and linked with buyers in EU markets, including customer relationship management. Protein Partnership projects and market transparency interventions supported local value chain beneficiaries.<br/>International PR, marketing and communication for awareness raising of EU businesses and consumers has been established.</p> <p><b>Component 7. Knowledge and technology transfer</b><br/>Included centrally managed Quality Management, sustainability with new standard developments and quality assurance along the value chain as well as agriculture and Research &amp; Innovation with knowledge transfer and dissemination in production and processing.</p> <p><b>Component 8. Project development and consultancy</b><br/>Support to project development and access to funding through consulting and technical assistance have been provided.</p> <p><b>Component 9. Project management and implementation</b><br/>Project implementation has been running smoothly, including general coordination (and cross-cutting issues), financial and administrative management, monitoring and reporting.</p>  |
| <b>Beneficiaries (targets)</b>        | <p>1,220 agricultural producers (small, medium and large)<br/>10 collectors and traders<br/>25 users of soya (feed and food producers)<br/>12 soya processors<br/>6 input suppliers (seeds)<br/>10 Extension service providers and farmer associations, agricultural institutes<br/>6 research institution<br/>10 certification and control/inspection bodies and laboratories<br/>6 government institutions</p>  |

### Introduction

The report summarises the achievements and results of the ADA-supported Strategic Partnership Programme (SPP), "Building sustainable, inclusive, and well-functioning value chains (VCs) for non-GM soya and organic soya in Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina," with contract number ADA 2530-00/2017. This 9 million Euro Programme was implemented by Donau Soja between January 2017 and February 2024 and financed with a 50% funding rate by ADA as a donor, along with Donau Soja as the implementing partner.

The final report presents key conclusions and results of 86 months of implementation (84 months implementation and the last 2 months closing and reporting) in all 9 project components and all 4 target countries. The numbers in this report are final as of the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2023. Where values were not available (e.g. average yield for 2023), estimated values were used. Donau Soja did not have a system that excludes the repeated counting of the same participants in the project, therefore the participation values should be viewed cumulatively (i.e. one and the same participant may have been counted more than once). Therefore, the report presents the number of participations as the indication of the number of beneficiaries. All interim Programme Reports, submitted every half-year during the programme implementation, can be used as annexes containing more detailed information on progress and implemented activities.

The overall Programme achievements are rated as excellent, surpassing initially defined targets for almost every indicator. Extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine did not affect the relevance of the Programme, and Donau Soja was able to find alternative ways of working and supporting team members and project beneficiaries without breaks in implementation. Nevertheless, these events resulted in the need to adapt the programme's timeframe, leading to the implementation being prolonged twice without a budget increase.

The report is prepared by Donau Soja. It combines a graphical presentation of results for quick and easy information retrieval, along with short narratives providing additional information. It integrates a selection of success stories, photos collected during implementation, and beneficiary quotes that best illustrate the changes achieved in the regions.

The report is structured in five chapters:

#### **Chapter 1 - About the Strategic Partnership Programme**

The chapter provides a summary of information about the Strategic Partnership Programme, delving into its development, presenting key facts, introducing Donau Soja, and the team responsible for its implementation. Additionally, it offers a glimpse into future developments. The results of the external evaluation, along with its recommendations, are also presented.

#### **Chapter 2 - Overall results and crosscutting topics**

This section offers a concise overview of the overall results and crosscutting topics, including environment, gender, and social considerations. It emphasises the significance of the Programme, which witnessed the active participation of over 23,000 registered participations (with 24% being women) and more than 500 legal entities across 430 activities. The Programme facilitated the production of more than 2.3 million tonnes of sustainably produced non-GM soya, with contribution to soya surface development in

Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and increased yields in Ukraine. Furthermore, the chapter elaborates on the Programme's contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 15, and 17.

### **Chapter 3- Results per target country**

This chapter contains significant milestones and changes achieved in each target country, placing a particular emphasis on component indicators and the percentage of their fulfilment for both target countries and international components. Additionally, an extra narrative overview has been provided, summarising and consolidating the graphically presented data, complemented by quotes obtained from project beneficiaries.

### **Chapter 4 - Results per intervention field**

This section serves as a testament to the cumulative changes and results achieved across all relevant fields of interventions/components, presented per topic rather than per country. These fields include accomplishments in:

- ✓ Knowledge creation and dissemination in the field of agriculture,
- ✓ Market and value chain development,
- ✓ Awareness raising, marketing, and communication,
- ✓ Quality management and certification,
- ✓ Standard development and sustainability,
- ✓ Business environment and policy framework,
- ✓ Project development and consultancy.

The presented results are accompanied by success stories that highlight major changes and achievements of the Programme. Presenting results by intervention fields, rather than just dividing them by regions, has allowed for a more comprehensive and complete presentation of the outcomes.

### **Chapter 5- Lessons learned and project management and administration**

Lessons learned and project management and administration is a chapter of the report dedicated to highly significant insights gained and essential administrative and organisational processes that influenced the implementation. The lessons learned proved invaluable as they were applied during implementation, aiding in the planning and formulation of proposals for continued collaboration. They can also benefit all those who read the report in planning their current and future projects. In the project management section, the project's course is described, which had to be extended twice due to exceptional circumstances. Additionally, details related to administration, governance, planning, monitoring, visibility, and budget are outlined.





**1**  
**ABOUT**  
**Donau Soja - ADA**  
**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

**ABOUT DONAU SOJA – ADA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP - IN A NUTSHELL**

**How did the partnership develop and why?**

Donau Soja is promoting a sustainable protein supply from Europe for Europe. This is achieved by Donau Soja teams who bring knowledge and state-of-the-art technologies, promote investments, build networks, link markets, promote market transparency, introduce quality management measures and Donau Soja requirements, and advise local stakeholders - from farmers to politicians. The work is also conducted in the European Union’s (EU) neighbourhood, an area in which soybeans are traditionally grown. This was recognised by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), the agency for Austrian development cooperation, resulting in a Strategic Partnership with Donau Soja that started in 2017 and was extended until February 2024. The Partnership emerged as a result of a year-and-a-half-long Inception phase (2015-2016) during which analyses were conducted, and the project's foundations were laid.

**Key facts**

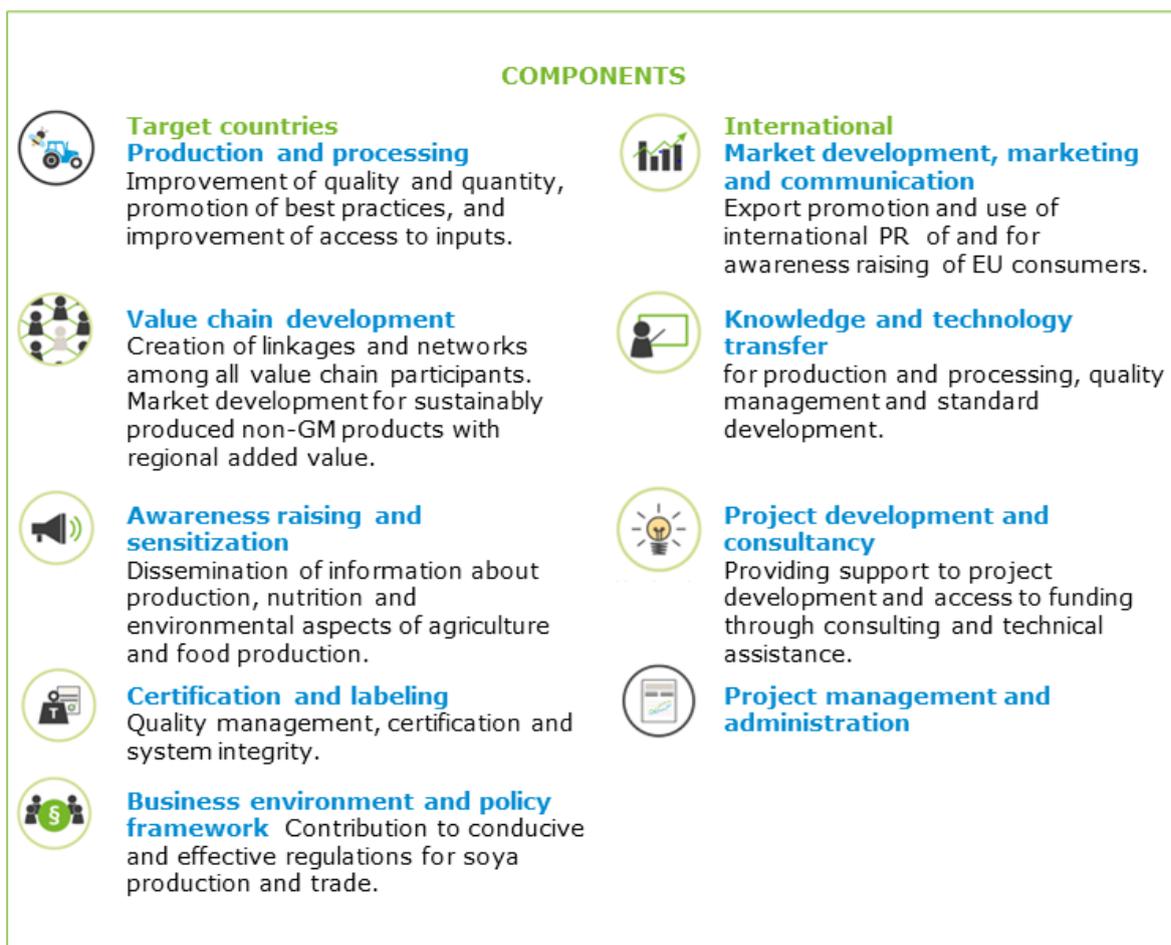
The analyses conducted during the Inception phase confirmed the critical role of the food and agriculture sector in promoting economic development and reducing poverty in Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, despite their unique differences. Based on them, the Programme was designed to work on the empowerment of stakeholders to overcome barriers such as insufficient knowledge, information, and skills, increasing their ability to adapt to environmental changes, implement sustainable agricultural practices, and participate in certified supply chains.

The project value was EUR 9 million, financed equally by ADA and Donau Soja. This support has allowed Donau Soja to open offices in Ukraine and Moldova, and to enlarge the office in Serbia. The Programme supported successful application and implementation of the DevRAM project<sup>1</sup>. The extensive programme created bridges between Southern and South-Eastern Europe (traditional soybean-producing countries) and the EU (soybean-consumer countries), and contributed to climate protection. Hence, soya VCs were recognised as an engine for enabling sustainable, inclusive economic development, and meeting United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



<sup>1</sup> In April 2018, Donau Soja started the implementation of a project for increasing the competitiveness of the Moldovan agri-food sector (with a special focus on the soya value chain). Based on an agreement between ADA and DS, the project further strengthened the Moldova component of the regionally organised Strategic Partnership. As the scope of the two projects was very similar, to avoid any misunderstandings or overlapping it has been agreed that the majority of costs are financed through this new Moldovan project. The short overview incl. beneficiaries which is given in this report serves to ensure the completeness of this Strategic Partnership Report. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2021, the project has been completed. Detailed Report on activities conducted in Moldova will be given in the Narrative report for DevRAM Action 2017/389-857//ADA Contract Number: 6541-01/2017.

The Programme was organised in 9 areas of intervention- components out of which 5 were implemented in the countries and 4 internationally.



## Future plans

Building on success and lessons learned, Donau Soja has decided to extend the valuable experience gained from the initial Strategic Partnership Programme and start a Multicrop programme going beyond soya. This expansion responds to market demand, and is also motivated by local farmers in the target countries who wish to enhance their overall farm production. The decision to expand beyond soya is not only market-driven but also offers various benefits to the environment. Moving forward, we will continue supporting the soya sector and gradually explore the inclusion of other crops. This was proposed in new Grant application for the next phase of Strategic Partnership Programme, submitted in June 2023 and approved in December 2023. The new phase is planned to start on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2024 and last until the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2029.



## DONAU SOJA ORGANISATION - IN A NUTSHELL

Donau Soja is a European, multi-stakeholder, non-profit membership organisation supporting the European Protein Transition with a particular emphasis on sustainable European non-GM soya production.

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| <b>Organisation</b>    | International<br>Non-for-profit<br>Multistakeholder<br>Independent   |
| <b>Vision</b>          | Sustainable, safe & European protein supply  |
| <b>Mission</b>         | Donau Soja supports its partners and members in progressing change to address social, environmental and economic challenges in soya production and consumption. This will increase efficiency, fairness and sustainability in European food and feed protein value chains.   |
| <b>Members</b>         | <b>326</b> members from <b>31</b> countries  |
| <b>Offices</b>         |  Vienna (Austria)<br> Novi Sad (Serbia)<br> Kyiv (Ukraine)<br> Chisinau (Moldova) |
| <b>Representatives</b> |  Amsterdam (Netherlands)<br> Bucharest (Romania)   |

|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Activities</b>   |  |  |  |
|   | Credible standard systems   | Market and supply-chain development  | Advocacy & policy   |
|  |  |  |  |
| Knowledge transfer  | Communication, marketing & events   | Science, Innovation and analytical tools   | Network building with members and partners  |

More information



**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | TEAM**

**Austria & International**



**Moldova**



**DevRAM Project Team**



**Serbia**



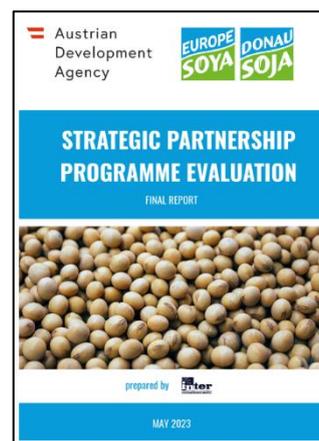
**Ukraine**



## EVALUATION

### Evaluation confirmed Strategic Partnership success

To assess Strategic Partnership, an external, independent evaluation was conducted, led by the Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER) from Belgrade, Serbia. The evaluation assessed overall achievements against programme objectives and indicators up to June 2022, and potentials for future programming. The evaluation methodology incorporated a diverse range of qualitative and quantitative instruments for assessing data obtained through a participatory approach, engaging key stakeholders across all four countries, and a thorough review of Programme documentation. It employed a comprehensive methodology aligned with [OECD/DAC](#) and ADA Guidelines.



The Evaluation report states that, based on evidence and findings collected through the evaluation assignment, it can be firmly concluded that the Strategic Partnership is well planned and successfully implemented multi-country Programme intervention of private sector development. It was well implemented by a competent team of managers, with good governance mechanisms and well-designed communication instruments that developed trust and mobilised key stakeholders and beneficiaries to actively participate in the activities.

Further, the report finds, that Donau Soja has a competitive advantage and international recognition in supporting value-chain in sustainable and non-genetically modified (non-GM) soya products of a premium quality, both internationally and domestically. This fact positively reflected the Programme, which has been effective in achieving indicators, exceeding targeted values multiple times, which is also a strong sign of success. The Programme's success prompted an extension until February 2024, shifting indicator targets accordingly. Experts assessed cross-cutting issues and concluded that the Programme was also successful in contributing to environmental protection and climate change, not only at the local level but globally as well. There is also a positive contribution of the Programme to horizontal issues, especially in gender mainstreaming by supporting women to participate in all types of the Programme activities. Measuring the Programme's effects on the SDGs presents a model of best practice in development interventions.

In recommendations, the findings from the evaluation indicate the importance of continuing the Strategic Partnership between Donau Soja and ADA to a new cycle, benefiting from lessons learned and best practices from the current intervention. To achieve a broader impact, the inclusion of other crops from the crop rotation would significantly contribute to the spread of sustainable, non-GM practices in agricultural production across all target countries. This would enable Donau Soja to have a wider environmental impact and reach a greater number of the Programme beneficiaries. The findings also indicate the necessity to further promote a concept of sustainable agriculture, which has positive effects on local farming and explore possibilities of including advanced digital tools in sustainable non-GM soybean and other crop production.

## Recommendations of external evaluation

- Recommendation #1:** To **continue with the Strategic Partnership** between ADA and Donau Soja with the new private sector development Programme that will fully **integrate to the Inclusive Market System Development Approach** by making market work for the poor.
- Recommendation #2:** To **continue to support soya sector and gradually approach the inclusion of other crops** in the Programme. Inclusion of other crops from crop rotation would significantly contribute to the spread of sustainable non-GM practices in agricultural production providing even greater support to farmers, all with the purpose to achieve the Programme outcomes.
- Recommendation #3:** To **design instruments for sustainability of the Programme results**, which will be closely monitored throughout the implementation so appropriate actions are taken in real time.
- Recommendation #4:** To **design more simple Programme structure** that will allow more flexible Programme management and fulfilment of administrative requirements by Donau Soja yet firm in terms of monitoring of outcomes and impact, SDG contributions and external risks.
- Recommendation #5:** To **continue working on sustainable agriculture**, environmental protection, and climate change, and include actions related to climate change adaptation and the climate smart agriculture.
- Recommendation #6:** To **include focus on horizontal issues** such as gender mainstreaming and inclusion of vulnerable groups, having in mind that the Programme should strongly **remain a private sector development intervention**.
- Recommendation #7:** To **explore possibilities of including advanced digital tools** and artificial intelligence in and sustainable non-GM soybean and other crop production.
- Recommendation #8:** To **design appropriate communication tools and visibility instruments** that are in line with contemporary practices and with needs and demands from key stakeholders and beneficiaries.





## 2

# Donau Soja - ADA Strategic Partnership OVERAL RESULTS AND CROSSCUTTING TOPICS

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | OVERALL RESULTS AND CROSSCUTTING TOPICS**  
**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | OVERALL RESULTS**

**People and activities**

2017 2023

Beneficiaries



**>23,000 PEOPLE participations**  
 from  
**>500 LEGAL ENTITIES**

Per country

- 16,356**
- 3,347**
- 2,869**
- 624**

Key standard indicators

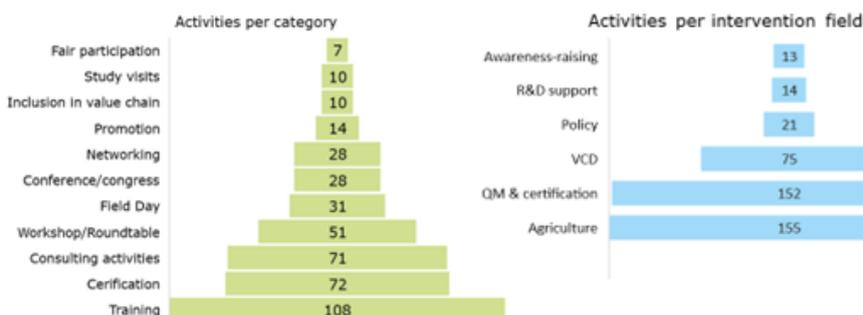
| People participation           | Target | Achieved | %     |
|--------------------------------|--------|----------|-------|
| Small, medium, large producers | 1,220  | 16,812   | 1378% |
| Small and medium producers     | 1,200  | 13,800   | 1150% |
| Persons benefiting             | 8,000  | 23,196   | 290%  |
| Employed people in DS          | 8      | 13       | 163%  |

| Legal entities                      | Target | Achieved | %     |
|-------------------------------------|--------|----------|-------|
| Collectors and traders              | 10     | 208      | 2080% |
| Food and feed producers             | 25     | 92       | 368%  |
| Processors                          | 12     | 30       | 250%  |
| Input suppliers                     | 6      | 93       | 1550% |
| Extension service providers         | 10     | 28       | 280%  |
| Research institutions               | 6      | 23       | 383%  |
| Certification bodies and labs       | 10     | 24       | 240%  |
| Government institutions, ministries | 6      | 22       | 367%  |

Activities

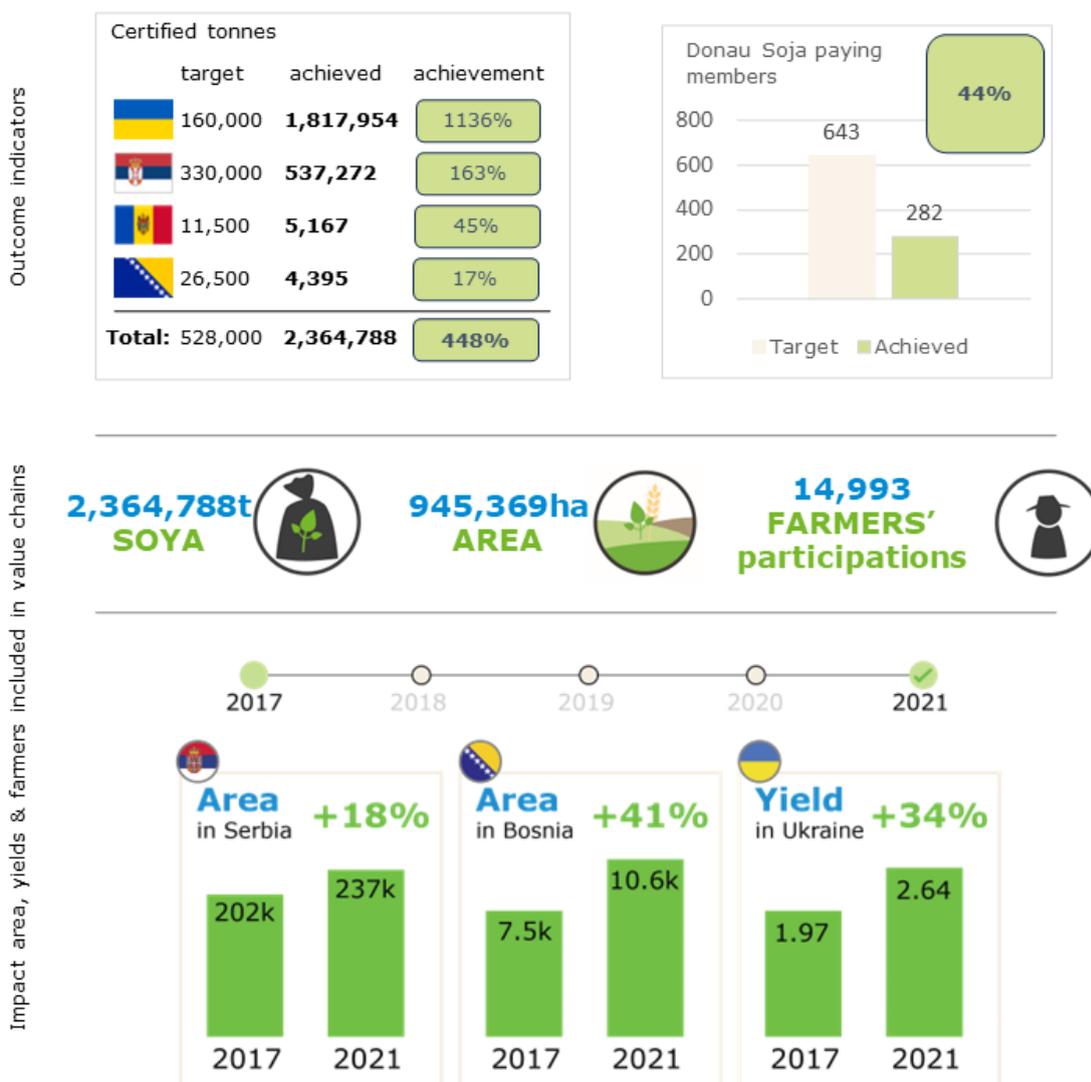
**>430 ACTIVITIES**



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | OVERALL RESULTS

### Outcome indicators - quantities and members

2017 2023



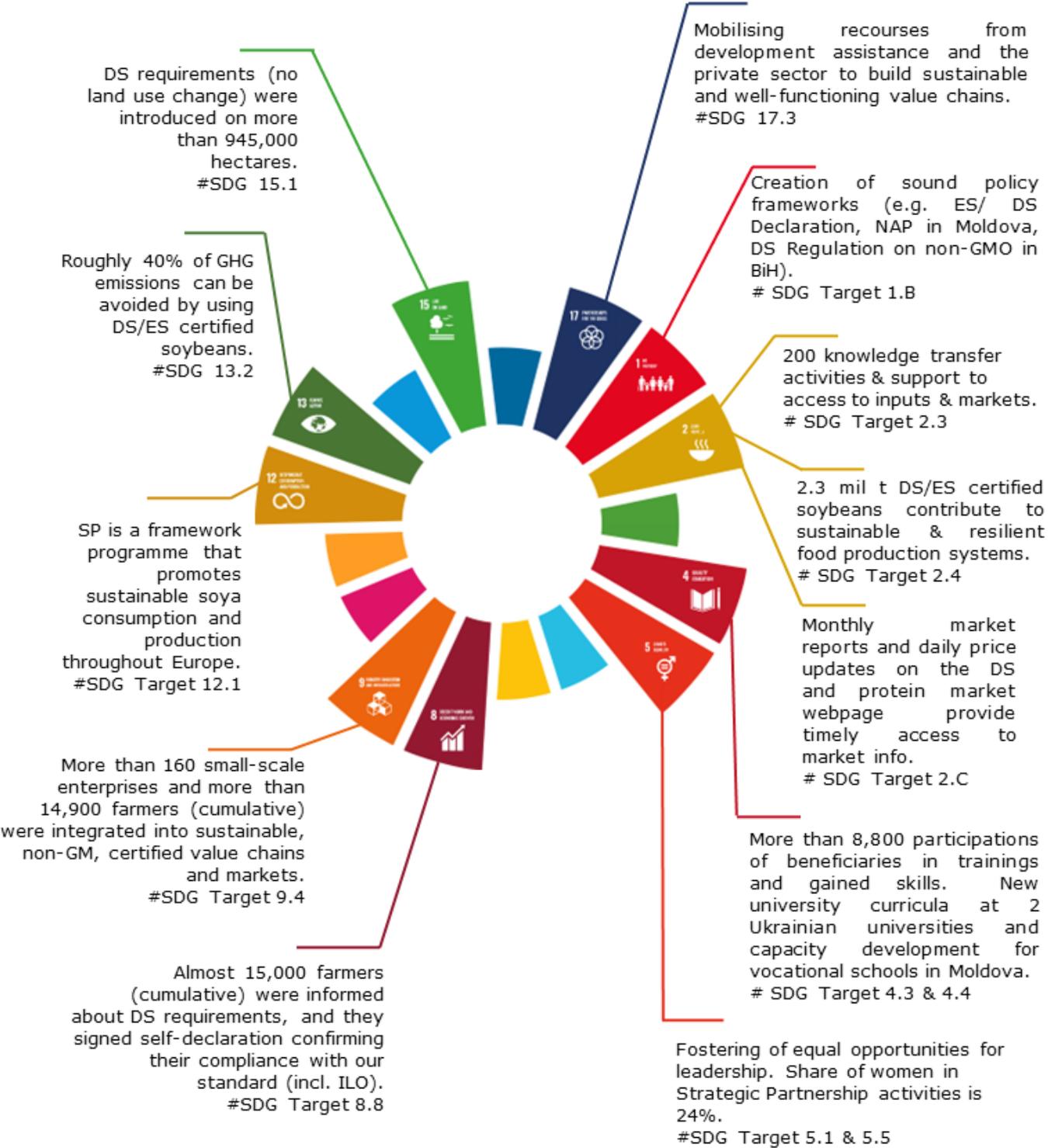
During the Strategic Partnership Programme from 2017 to 2023, Donau Soja registered **23,000+ participations** (24% women) and **500+ legal entities** through taking part in **over 430 activities**. Over **2.3 million tonnes of soya** were produced on **almost 950,000 hectares (ha)** by **14,900+ farmers' participations** (registrations in harvest declarations) that got involved in value added, certified, sustainable and non-GM value chains. The Programme significantly impacted soya surface development in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as increased yields in Ukraine.

Quantity targets were surpassed in Ukraine and Serbia, while they were not achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Moldova. However, in BiH, the production of non-GM certified goods and products increased to over 150,000 tonnes annually. In Moldova, significant progress was made at the regulatory and educational levels. Membership targets were also not met, but with the development of Protein Partnership as a new product and source of financing, Donau Soja managed to offset the predictions based on membership growth.

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | SDG CONTRIBUTION**

**ADA and Donau Soja Partnership for Goals**

**Our results in the past 7 years were aligned with and supported SDG Targets**



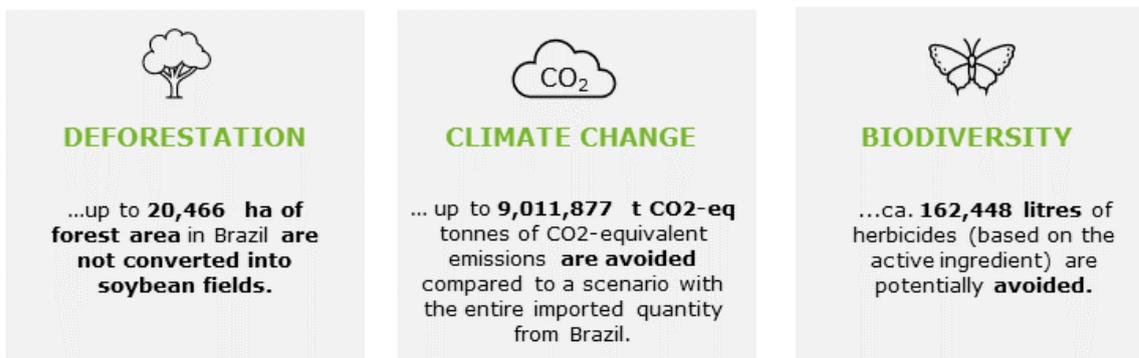
## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | CONTRIBUTION TO ENVIRONMENT

### Sowing sustainability and impact climate change

Strategic Partnership activities in agriculture and quality management significantly enhanced environmental protection. They promoted sustainable soybean production, upheld environmental standards, and integrated climate adaptation strategies. Collaboration with stakeholders facilitated responsible resource management and access to sustainable technologies. Training, materials, and demonstrations covered crop rotation, precision agriculture, reduced pesticide use, the right choice of varieties and non-GM seeds, organic and regenerative farming and other sustainable practices. Farmers adopted and tested these practices on demonstration platforms and in their everyday work, aligning with Donau Soja Standards that emphasise European origin, non-GMO quality, and socio-environmental-economic principles.

The sustainability team developed indicators to measure the sustainability performance of the Strategic Partnership, based on recent Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) data<sup>2</sup> on DS/ES soybean cultivation by Blonk, as well as earlier studies and research. During this seven-year period (2017-2023), a total of 2,314,491 tonnes of DS/ES certified soybeans in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine were made available for the international value chain through the SPP with ADA. This effort resulted in the avoidance of forest loss (up to 20,466 hectares of forest areas in Brazil were not converted for soybean cultivation), reduction of greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions (up to 9,011,877 tonnes of Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)-eq compared to a scenario with the total volume imported from Brazil), and a decrease in herbicide usage (162,448 litres).

In period **2017-2023**, in **7 years**, in total **2.3 million tonnes** of soybeans have been produced within Strategic Partnership. Therefore...



### Responsible implementation, resource management and environmental impact reduction

Donau Soja effectively managed resources, minimised waste, and reduced environmental impact through programme implementation. We conducted knowledge transfer activities both on-site and online, reducing travel. Digital platforms reduced printed materials and supported eco-friendliness. Online tools like Zoom and MS Teams facilitated communication and reduced business flights and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Procurement included criteria for gender, social, and environmental standards. Additionally, we worked on development of the "Donau Soja Green Book" and appointed a sustainability focal point (SFP).

<sup>2</sup> For more details: [LINK](#)

## SUCCESS STORY | ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT OF DS/ES PRODUCTS

In the light of an unprecedented climate crisis, corporate climate reporting obligations become more and more important. Over the past five years Donau Soja commissioned several carbon footprint studies and comprehensive LCA projects to support its partners and members in showing the environmental benefits of certified European soya bean sourcing and to support soya bean producers and processors in target countries in marketing their produce.

### Reducing emissions on the level of soya beans

In 2021 Dutch consultancy Blonk Consultants assessed the environmental impact of Donau Soja / Europe Soya certified soya beans in the target countries Serbia and Ukraine as well as in Croatia and Romania. The results showed that with a CO<sub>2</sub> footprint of around 0.3-0.4 kg CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents per kg soybean, Donau Soja / Europe Soya certified soybeans account for half of the emissions compared to average European soybeans and avoid more than 90% of emissions compared to Brazilian soybeans with a deforestation background. Due to segregated and traceable supply chains in Donau Soja / Europe Soya certification this CO<sub>2</sub> emission reduction is transmitted through the supply chain from soya beans to processed soya products and feed and food products.

### Reducing emissions on the level of processed products

A 2022 study by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) Austria assessed the carbon footprint of soybean meal by Ukrainian processor AdamPolSoya (ATK Group) using Europe Soya certified soybean from Ukraine. The results show a reduction of GHG-emissions of up to 82%: 1 kg of ES certified soybean meal by AdamPolSoya corresponds to 0.36 kg CO<sub>2</sub>-eq., whereas the average soybean meal available at the European market with the usual imported soybean mix is responsible for 1.99 kg CO<sub>2</sub>-eq. Furthermore, the use of Donau Soja/ Europe Soya certified feed shows great success in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in livestock production. For example, studies conducted by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) Austria on the premium pork brands *GUSTINO Strohschwein* and *EDEKA Hofglück* showed a reduction of around minus 40 % by feeding Donau Soja / Europe Soya certified feed derived from soya beans from target and other countries instead of average feed.

Part of Donau Soja's mission is to address environmental challenges in soybean production and consumption. The environmental impact data of Donau Soja / Europe Soya certified soybeans are publicly available as so-called "branded dataset" via Blonk Consultant's Agri-footprint database and GFLI database and can be used for further Life Cycle Assessments (LCA) and Carbon Footprint calculations in voluntary and mandatory corporate climate reporting.

More information

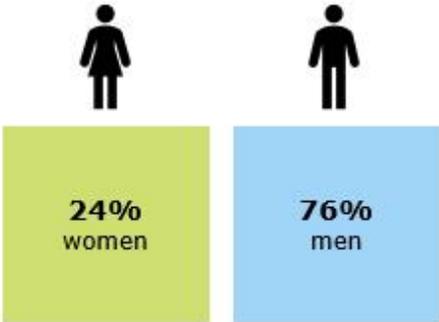


**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | EMPOWERING WOMEN**

**Exceeding the target by twice the expectation!**

Gender monitoring resulted in a remarkable 24% female participation in activities, surpassing the 2017 target of 10% by more than double. While the Programme was not specifically gender-focused, overreaching the targets was important to ensure equal opportunities for women in the traditionally male-dominated agriculture sector. The positive results were also a consequence of the Gender audit conducted in 2019, which recommended responsive actions and the inclusion of accessibility aspects by planning. The active invitation of women to participate aimed to enhance their involvement and knowledge access, ultimately promoting greater agency and more equitable power relations.

Additionally, the Gender audit of soya value chains recommended the development and inclusion of gender-transformative actions. To further empower women in the sector, Donau Soja implemented a range of activities that motivate women and promote women’s role models. These initiatives included social media promotions, workshops for female journalists on International Women’s Day (March 8<sup>th</sup>), elevating women as speakers (resulting in 34% female speakers throughout the Programme period), establishing award systems to recognise outstanding women agronomists, and organising networking events with mentors for young agronomist.

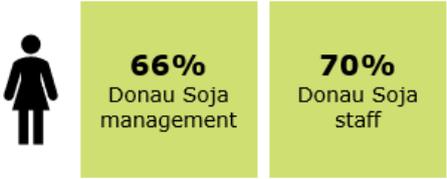


**How Strategic Partnerships and a Gender audit impacted DS Organisation**

Within the Strategic Partnership, a Gender audit of the Donau Soja Organisation was conducted as well, and ever since, we have been following the recommendations from this assessment. We continuously strive to integrate gender equality into all our policies, programmes, and projects, and work to remove any barriers that prevent women from accessing opportunities, benefits, and services.

developed gender terminology guideline and included gender equality principles in our statute in 2020. Our internal salary system, developed in 2022, guarantees fairness and consistency in payment across all countries.

More concretely, 42% of our board, and 66% of executive management are women as well as 70% of our entire staff. Following the Gender audit recommendations, we



## SUCCESS STORY | INSPIRING YOUNG WOMEN FOR AGRICULTURE AND SOYA

**In Donau Soja organisation we believe in promoting gender equality and empowering women through our activities. Gender equality is essential for achieving our goals and promoting sustainable and responsible practices.**

After a Gender audit in 2019, supported through Strategic Partnership, Donau Soja took action, creating 'Best Young Agronomist-Lady' and 'The Best Young Agronomist-Soya' national awards in Ukraine, to inspire young women in agriculture and soya value chains. The winners were connected with successful women mentors. In August 2021, Donau Soja hosted the winners in Austria. They met with ADA representatives, visited Donau Soja's headquarters, explored soybean research at University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), toured Saatbau Linz seed plant and soybean fields, and met an organic soybean farmer with free-range chicken. This visit promoted women's roles in agriculture and soya business, and was supported by media coverage for wider impact.



"Participating in and winning the competition has significantly contributed to my professional development within the company, motivating me to concurrently engage in scientific activities alongside my work in agricultural production. Thanks to the competition, I had the opportunity to visit Austria as part of an educational and practical trip organized by the Donau Soja Organisation within the Strategic Partnership Project with the Austrian Development Agency. This experience provided me with valuable insights and practical examples that I have gradually incorporated into my work. Participating in the gender competition and the trip to Austria once again affirmed my professional choice - agriculture is not just my job but my passion and my way of life."

**Olga Ivanchenko, deputy director of TOV «Agross++»  
The winner of the Best Young Agronomist. Agrolady 2020 competition.**

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | EMPOWERING SMALLHOLDERS

Non-discrimination and equal participation for all social groups were core principles of the Strategic Partnership Programme. Soybean, a vital global cash crop, typically demands substantial land and technical resources for profitable cultivation. Donau Soja, however, engaged in activities for the empowerment of smaller market players and farmers, ensuring that all project activities and outputs cater to their needs. By the end of Strategic Partnership, we've supported 13,800 (out of total 23,196) small and medium farmers through capacity development, training, and participation in international VCs.



### Inclusive strategies for smallholders

**Tailored local planning:** Activities were organised and adapted to local circumstances and needs, developed in collaboration with local experts.

**Practical and feasible focus:** The focus was on practical and feasible approaches e.g. Donau Soja organised demo fields and field days, field and study tours etc.

**Local language in implementation:** Activities and materials (Best practice manuals, Farmers handbooks, info sheets, posters etc) were organised in local languages.

**Collaboration with flagship partners:** Collaboration was established with flagship partners and organisations, which play a crucial role in rural employment and serve as examples for others.

**Group certification:** Group certification was introduced to reduce certification and training costs and enable access to a higher number of smallholders efficiently.

**Timing considerations:** Activities were scheduled at times when smallholders or women, could actively participate, taking into account peak working days related to agricultural production.

**Accessibility and affordability:** Activities were conducted in rural areas to ensure easier access. When necessary, transportation (e.g., busses) was organised to help participants to attend. A significant portion of our knowledge-transfer activities was made available online. This provided access to everyone, anytime, regardless of location or time. Additional efforts were made to disseminate information and new knowledge through the classical media (like TV), as agricultural programmes continue to be a very important medium for the transfer of information and knowledge to users.

**Expert exchange:** To better understand the needs and challenges of small farmers, and to establish new networks and collaborations with smallholders, the Donau Soja actively participated in different events where smallholders were the target audience, and used opportunities and networking as tools for knowledge transfer and awareness raising.



### 3

## Donau Soja - ADA Strategic Partnership RESULTS PER COUNTRY

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | RESULTS PER COUNTRY**  
**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | MOLDOVA**

**Significant milestones and changes achieved in Moldova**

-  **Donau Soja Office** established in **2018**
-  **DevRAM** Project 2018-2021
-  **2,869 +** registered participations in the Programme, denoting individuals who benefited from activities or Donau Soja services
-  **186 +** activities implemented
-  **5,167 t** of soybeans certified
-  **24** certified partners and investment in **2** local processing facility (cake producer)
-  **1** local food labelling project
-  **National Action Plan**, **2** relevant **laws** aligned with EU; national **subsidies** for legumes introduced and **national monitoring programme** established
-  **>40** other partners: CBs, input providers, R&D institutions, NGOs, public and governmental institutions etc.
-  **5** Members



"The market demands protein-rich crops, and that's why we engaged in the ADA project. Collaborating with Donau Soja, we attended several seminars, shared our practices, and listened to others. Through this, we diversified our knowledge, and reached better technology."

**Arini Gheorghe and Valentin**  
AGDAV LCC

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | MOLDOVA**

**Moldova indicators results**

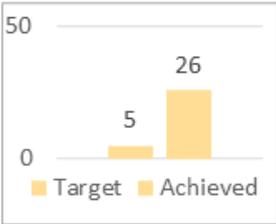
**Component 1: Production and processing**

**Target:** 11,500 tonnes produced DS/ES soya.

**Achieved:** 5,167 certified tonnes.



**Component 2: Value chain development**



**Target:** 5 soybean producing/ collecting/ processing/ food companies are selling DS-certified products.

**Achieved:** 26 soybean producing/ collecting/ processing/ food companies are selling DS-certified products on national, regional, and international markets.

**Component 3: Awareness raising and sensitization**

**Target:** 50% of interviewed consumers are aware of and informed/ educated about the importance of non-GMO labelling of products.

**Survey result:** 66.3% of interviewed consumers are aware of and informed/ educated about the importance of non-GMO labelling of products.



**Component 4: Labelling and certification**



**Target:** DS/ES standard is regularly adapted and translated into the local language and is publicly available.

**Achieved:** DS/ES standard was regularly adapted and translated following all standard changes.

**Component 5: Business environment and policy framework**

**Target:** EU-ADA project is approved and implemented within ADA/DS programme duration.

**Achieved:** DevRAM project was implemented 2018-2021.



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | MOLDOVA

### Summary for Moldova

Donau Soja initiated activities in Moldova during the Strategic Partnership Inception Phase. During this period, the Donau Soja Declaration was signed, the Strategic Partnership feasibility study was conducted, and a local consultant was hired to represent and support Donau Soja's activities in the country.

The actions in Moldova gained momentum with the official start of the Strategic Partnership. In 2018, we established the Representative office of the Donau Soja Association and opened a local office. This coincided with the start of the Development of Rural Areas in the Republic of Moldova (DevRAM) Project, implemented as part of the Strategic Partnership from 2018 to 2021. At the peak of DevRAM, our team comprised 5 members, while today, there are 2 colleagues actively contributing in Moldova.

Together with over 40 local partners, our team has achieved remarkable results, including the certification of 24 partners, two local primary processors, and the successful implementation of a local labelling project. Throughout the Strategic Partnership, more than 2,869 participations were registered in project activities, indicating the number of individuals who benefited from 186 Strategic Partnership activities.

Although the certification of soybeans reached 5,167 tonnes within the project, this accounted for 45% of the target value for certified tonnes. Despite the difficulties faced by farmers in Moldova, the implementation of the Donau Soja standard has succeeded in improving technological practices and strengthened the data collection and use of on-farm records. Nevertheless, all other project indicators were fully met, with the number of soybean-producing, collecting, processing and food companies exceeding expectations five times.

A particularly successful aspect of the Strategic Partnership was in shaping the business environment and policy framework. This was accomplished through the development of a National Action Plan, the introduction of national subsidies, and the implementation of relevant laws. Further details on this success story can be found in the chapter dedicated to Policy.



**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | UKRAINE**

**Significant milestones and changes achieved in Ukraine**



**Donau Soja Office** established in **2017**



**3,347 +** registered participations in the Programme, denoting individuals who benefited from Programme activities or Donau Soja services



**105 +** activities implemented



**> 1.8 million t** of soybeans certified during whole project period (~20 % of total Ukraine production certified after harvest 2022)



**36** certified partners and **1** crusher



**International labelling** - Ukraine soya used for Lidl Vemondo private label



**GM Control Law** – aligned with EU requirements **adopted in 2023**



**>70** other partners: CBs, input providers, R&D institutions, NGOs, public and governmental institutions etc.



**13** Members



"Donau Soja assists farmers and producers in Ukraine in enhancing the quality of soybeans, elevating them from basic commodity standards to meet higher criteria. By establishing a level playing field in Europe, approximately 20% of Ukrainian soybeans now adhere to EU production rules and regulations. This represents a significant milestone and serves as a tangible demonstration of the viable EU membership pathway for Ukrainian agriculture."

**Sergiy Galashevskyy**  
General Manager  
Certification Body Organic Standard

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | UKRAINE**

**Ukraine indicators results**

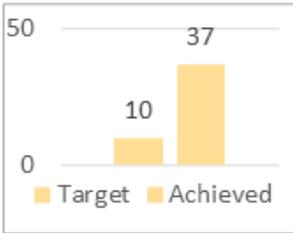
**Component 1: Production and processing**

**Target:** 160,000 tonnes produced DS/ES soya.

**Achieved:** 1,817,954 certified tonnes.



**Component 2: Value chain development**



**Target:** 10 soybean producing/ collecting/ processing/ food companies are selling DS-certified products.

**Achieved:** 37 soybean producing/ collecting/ processing/ food companies are selling DS-certified products on national, regional, and international markets.

**Component 3: Awareness raising and sensitization**

**Target:** 50% of interviewed consumers are aware of and informed/ educated about the importance of non-GMO labelling of products.

**Survey result:** 50% of interviewed consumers are aware of and informed/ educated about the importance of non-GMO labelling of products.



**Component 4: Labelling and certification**



**Target:** DS/ES standard is regularly adapted and translated into the local language and is publicly available.

**Achieved:** DS/ES standard was regularly adapted and translated following all standard changes.

**Component 5: Business environment and policy framework**

**Target:** Representatives of responsible government institutions are regularly updated (minimum two times a year) to EU standards and practices related to non-GMO topics.

**Achieved:** Representatives of responsible government institutions were regularly updated to EU standards and practices related to non-GMO topics.



**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | UKRAINE**

**Summary for Ukraine**

Having the support of the Strategic Partnership Programme for Ukraine, one of the largest and poorest countries in Europe, was crucial, especially during challenging times like war. Agriculture, constituting 17% of the country's GDP, is vital, and Donau Soja recognised the significant growth potential in sustainability and volume within the sector since the Programme's inception in 2017.

Donau Soja's actions in Ukraine gained momentum with the official start of the Strategic Partnership. In 2017, we established the local subsidiary of Donau Soja gGmbH and opened a local office. Initially, our team consisted of 5 members, and today, 4 colleagues actively contribute in Ukraine. We are currently seeking new colleagues in Ukraine to further strengthen our team and activities.

At the start, the agricultural sector faced challenges such as the illegal use of GM seeds, widespread harmful pesticide use, and the impacts of climate change. Moreover, there was an absence of an adequate legal framework. Recognising Ukraine's importance as the "breadbasket" of Europe, there were concerns about the potential favourability of the legal framework for GM soybean production, posing a threat to Ukraine's EU aspirations.

Donau Soja actively addressed these challenges by collaborating with partners to raise awareness, knowledge, and capacity in agricultural production. We facilitated the introduction of quality standards, certification processes, and lobbied for a legal framework aligned with the EU.

The indicator for certified tonnes was overachieved by more than 10 times. Despite the war and Ukraine's difficult situation, Donau Soja achieved historic success in 2022 by certifying nearly 20% of the total local production. The introduction of the first local crusher was significant, adding value through local processing and contributing to economic growth and employment. Our efforts in advising and lobbying resulted in the adoption of GMO legislation aligned with the EU.

Throughout the Strategic Partnership, over 3,340 participations were registered in project activities, benefiting individuals through 105 Strategic Partnership activities. We worked with over 70 local partners and 36 certified partners and a local crusher. Protein Partnership projects played a crucial role in developing value chains in Ukraine, with one notable success being the supply of certified soybeans to a European partner for tofu production sold in European retail chains.



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | SERBIA AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

### Significant milestones and changes achieved in Serbia and BiH



**Donau Soja Office** in Novi Sad, responsible for Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina established in 2014, **developed and enlarged** during the Strategic Partnership Programme



**>16,980** registered participations in the project (**16,356 in Serbia and 624 in BiH**), denoting individuals who benefited from Programme activities or Donau Soja services



**139 +** activities implemented



**> 540,000 t** of soybeans certified



**> 105** certified partners (incl. group certification) and **4** crushers



**10** partners in **4** local food labelling projects



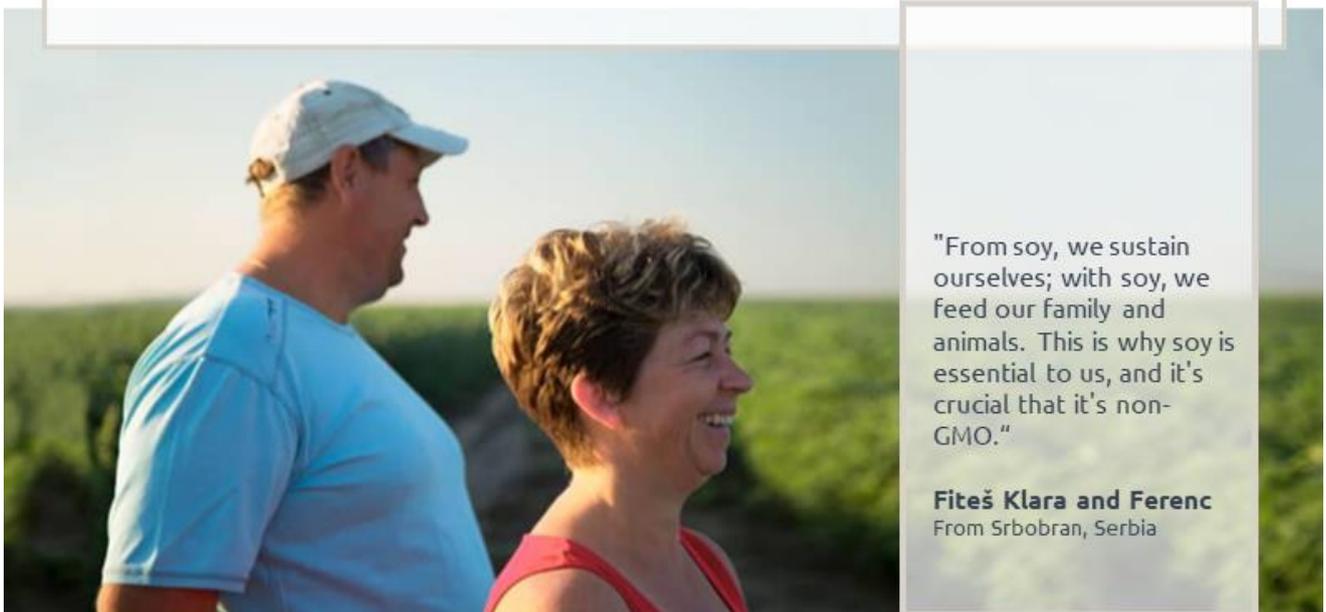
**GM Control Law in BiH**– aligned with EU requirements **adopted in 2023**



**>74** other partners: CBs, input providers, R&D institutions, NGOs, public and governmental institutions etc.



**20** Members



"From soy, we sustain ourselves; with soy, we feed our family and animals. This is why soy is essential to us, and it's crucial that it's non-GMO."

**Fiteš Klara and Ferenc**  
From Srbobran, Serbia

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | SERBIA

### Indicators achieved in Serbia

#### Component 1: Production and processing

**Target:** 330,000 tonnes produced DS/ES soya.

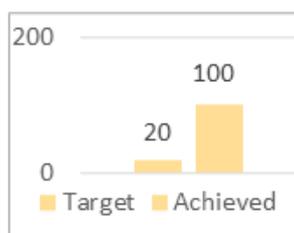
**Achieved:** 537,272 certified tonnes.



163%

#### Component 2: Value chain development

500%



**Target:** 20 soybean producing/collecting/processing/food companies are selling DS-certified products.

**Achieved:** 100 soybean producing/collecting/processing/food companies are selling DS-certified products on national, regional, and international markets.

#### Component 3: Awareness raising and sensitization

**Target:** 50% of interviewed consumers are aware of and informed/educated about the importance of non-GMO labelling of products.

**Survey result:** 50% of interviewed consumers are aware of and informed/educated about the importance of non-GMO labelling of products.



100%

#### Component 4: Standard development and certification system



100%

**Target:** DS/ES standard is regularly adapted and translated into the local language and is publicly available.

**Achieved:** DS/ES standard was regularly adapted and translated following all standard changes.

#### Component 5: Business environment and policy framework

**Target:** Representatives of responsible government institutions are regularly updated (minimum two times a year) to EU standards and practices related to non-GMO topics.

**Achieved:** Representatives of responsible government institutions were regularly updated to EU standards and practices related to non-GMO topics.



100%

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

### Indicators achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina

#### Component 1: Production and processing

**Target:** 26,500 tonnes produced DS/ES soya.

**Achieved:** 4, 395 certified tonnes.\*



17%

#### Component 2: Awareness raising and sensitization



100%

**Target:** 50% of interviewed consumers are aware of and informed/ educated about the importance of non-GMO labelling of products

**Survey result:** 50% of interviewed consumers are aware of and informed/ educated about the importance of non-GMO labelling of products.

#### Component 3: Standard development and certification system

**Target:** DS/ES standard is regularly adapted and translated into the local language and is publicly available.

**Achieved:** DS/ES standard was regularly adapted and translated following all standard changes. Non-GM Danube Region Standard played much more significant role.



100%

#### Component 4: Business environment and policy framework



100%

**Target:** Representatives of responsible government institutions are regularly updated (minimum two times a year) to EU standards and practices related to non-GMO topics.

**Achieved:** Representatives of responsible government institutions were regularly updated to EU standards and practices related to non-GMO topics.

\* The strategy for BiH was slightly changed from the implementation of the Donau Soja/Europe Soya standard to the implementation of the Non-GM Danube Region Standard, resulting in the certification of around 150,000 tonnes of non-GM products every year.

## **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | SERBIA AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

### **Summary for Serbia and BiH**

Established in 2014, the Donau Soja Regional Centre Novi Sad (DS RCNS) took on the responsibility of implementing the Strategic Partnership in both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through this partnership, DS RCNS has been strengthened and developed, currently counting eight skilled professionals providing support across various fields in the region. Additionally, certain core functions of Donau Soja were delegated to the team, including the management of the Strategic Partnership itself.

Over the past seven years, DS RCNS primary focus has been on promoting environmentally and socially responsible non-GM soybean production in the region. Collaborating with partners, we've added value through standardisation, market development, and support for soybean production, processing, trade, and usage. Throughout the Strategic Partnership, in both countries, over 16,980 participations (16,356 in Serbia and 624 in BiH) were registered in project activities, denoting individuals that benefited through 139 Strategic Partnership activities. Despite varying production conditions, our goal of enhancing competitiveness in the soybean sector has remained steadfast. In Serbia, the strategy involved promoting local market growth, especially in the egg sector, and accessing export markets (with over one-third of Serbian soya production exported in 2020), emphasising Donau Soja/Europe Soya standards. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Donau Soja initiative achieved success by implementing the non-GM Danube Region Standard for local and regional markets.

Within the scope of the Strategic Partnership, this team has facilitated the production and certification of 540,00 tonnes of soybeans, surpassing the target value, by collaborating with more than 100 certified partners and 14,828 farmers (cumulative) over the past seven years. We consider it an exceptional success to have four certified crushers in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with ten companies in four labelling projects and over 70 local partners from various sectors, including government and civil society.

When the project started in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation regarding GMO usage was not transparent, public awareness was lacking, and the legal framework was in its early stages. This was not only recognised by Donau Soja but also by our local partners, who are significant stakeholders in BiH. In agreement with stakeholders, the strategy was slightly changed from the implementation of the Donau Soja/Europe Soya standard to the implementation of the Non-GM Danube Region Standard, resulting in the certification of around 150,000 tonnes of non-GM products every year.

Through the Strategic Partnership Programme, Donau Soja facilitated the introduction of non-GMO quality and product labelling for oil products and private-label eggs. Now, both non-GMO labelled products can be found on more than 130 shelves of retail stores across BiH. In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Food Agency, and other partners, a large campaign and public awareness initiative were organised. This resulted in Bosnia becoming a regional leader in non-GMO labelling. Thanks to this initiative and with the support of local VCs, Bosnian farmers now have reliable partners in important local companies and are more resilient against unfair competition from imports. This has also brought numerous benefits to consumers, enabling them to make informed choices.

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | INTERNATIONAL**

**Indicators achieved in international components**

**Component 6: Awareness raising and market development (Vienna)**

**Target:** Minimum 20 International presentations /participations of SEE companies in international events.

**Achieved:** SEE Companies participated at 44 international events. Beside this, SEE companies participated at 177 local events and Donau Soja presented SEE markets and companies on additional 66 events. In total Donau Soja and target country companies benefited from participation on 287 events.



**Component 7: Knowledge and technology transfer (Novi Sad)**



**Target:** DS/ES production manual is regularly updated and translated to local languages.

**Achieved:** DS/ES production manual was regularly updated and translated to local languages. In addition, in 2022 Donau Soja developed Farmers Handbook.

**Component 8: Technical assistance (Vienna)**

**Target:** DS supported local partners in application to minimum 2 new international projects.

**Achieved:** DS supported local partners in application to 4 new international projects.



**Component 9: General administration and project management (Vienna and Novi Sad)**



**Target:** Regular reporting according to ADA Terms and Conditions is achieved according to defined time schedule.

**Achieved:** Regular reporting according to ADA Terms and Conditions was achieved according to defined time schedule.

The international activities were primarily executed by the proficient team at Donau Soja in Vienna, with a focus on benefiting recipients in target countries. This international support played a pivotal role, particularly in fostering the development of export value chains and facilitating the transfer of new knowledge and innovation. Remarkably, all indicator targets on the international level were not only met but, in some instances, exceeded, often doubling the initially set targets.

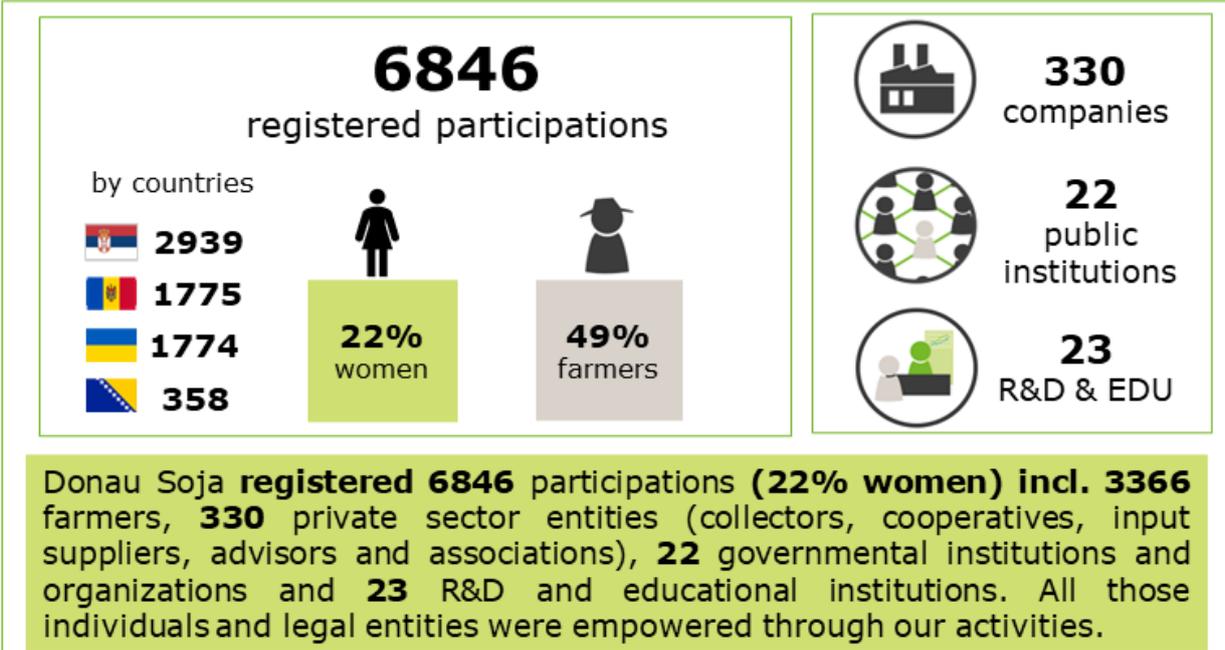
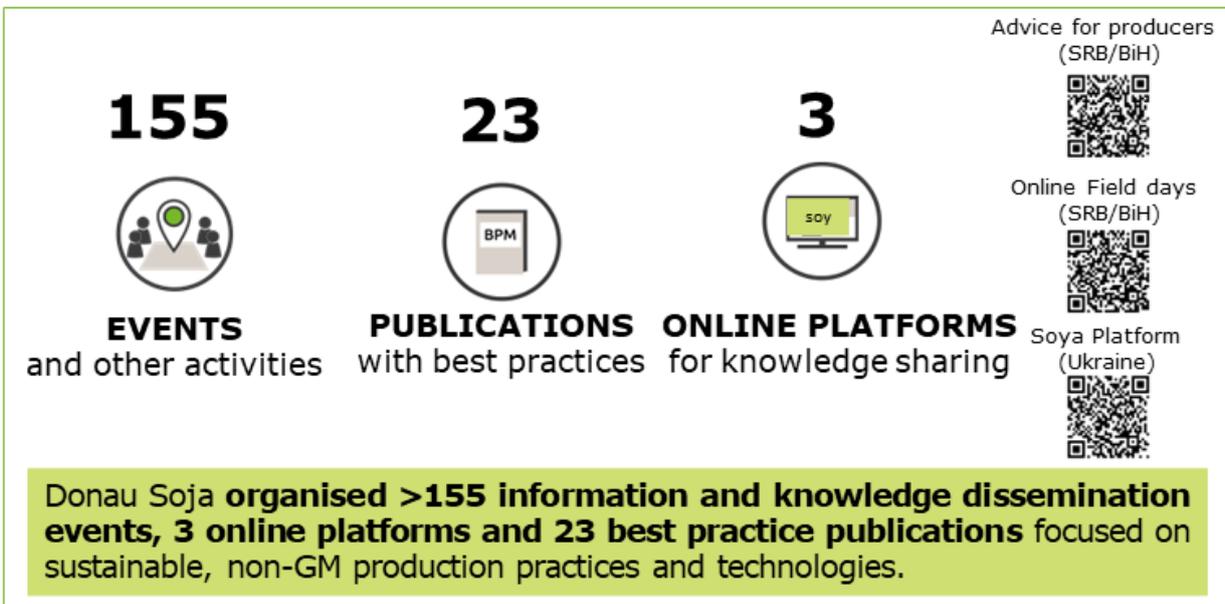


# 4

## Donau Soja - ADA Strategic Partnership RESULTS PER INTERVENTION FIELD

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | RESULTS PER INTERVENTION FIELD**  
**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | AGRICULTURE**

**Milestones & results overview**



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Benefits for target groups and local communities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Increased yields</li> <li>✓ Reduced production costs</li> <li>✓ Resilience to climate change</li> <li>✓ Long-term viability</li> <li>✓ Diversification</li> <li>✓ Access to markets</li> <li>✓ Improved marketability</li> <li>✓ Compliance with social and labour rights</li> <li>✓ Compliance with regulations</li> </ul> | <p><b>Benefits for Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Climate change mitigation</li> <li>✓ Improved soil health</li> <li>✓ Reduced environmental impact</li> <li>✓ Resource conservation</li> <li>✓ Biodiversity preservation</li> <li>✓ Responsible land management</li> </ul> |
|---|---|

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | AGRICULTURE RESULTS

### Sustainable change: contribution to agriculture transformation

Within the Strategic Partnership for period 2017-2023 Donau Soja organised a total of **155 activities** focused on creating, collecting, and disseminating information and knowledge related to agriculture and best practices in sustainable, non-GM soybean production. These activities, divided **by type** included: 62 training sessions, 31 demonstration fields/field days, 26 workshops/roundtable discussions, 24 consultations 6 conferences/congresses, and 5 study visits. The distribution of these activities **per country** was as follows: 71 activities in Moldova, 39 activities in Ukraine and 45 activities in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A total of **23 best practice information and knowledge materials** were developed and disseminated. The most important materials were best practice manuals and farmers' handbooks in four languages, information sheets on social and labour rights and standards, information on inoculation, soybean leaflets, and an Agri-Climatic Atlas specific to Ukraine.

Throughout the Programme, **three digital platforms** were developed and launched ([for Serbia/BiH professional advice for producers](#) and [for Serbia/BiH Field days](#), [for Ukraine Soya Platform](#)), and we translated the [Legume Hub](#) platform to local languages. These digital platforms aim to improve the dissemination of information and knowledge. This digitalisation allowed for broader access to stakeholders and ensured that knowledge and information could be accessed at any time and from any location.

All activities and materials were collaboratively developed with local experts, taking into account the specific needs of local stakeholders, and presented in local languages. The majority of our activities were intentionally held in rural areas with carefully selected times convenient for stakeholders to participate, ensuring that events were within their reach. Moreover, when necessary, we provided support, such as arranging transportation, such as busses, to facilitate stakeholders' attendance at the locations.

Throughout the Programme, Donau Soja registered **participation with a total of 6,846 individuals (cumulative)** by involving them in various agricultural activities. When categorised **by industry**, the breakdown of participation is as follows: 3,366 were agriculture producers, with more than **70% being small or medium-sized farmers**; 973 individuals were employed by input providers; 591 were researchers; 218 were from the NGO sector and advisory services; 169 were involved in collection and trading; 71 worked in public institutions; 61 were in processing; 56 were associated with CBs and labs; 29 worked for feed and food companies and 1,312 individuals were engaged in various other industries. When divided **by country**, we registered 2,939 participations in Serbia (due to small-scale structures), followed by Moldova with 1,775, Ukraine with 1,774, and Bosnia and Herzegovina with 358. Although it's a traditionally male-dominated sector, we proudly report that as many as 22% of **women** have participated in our agricultural activities.

Donau Soja supported 330 companies, 22 public institutions, and 23 research and development (R&D) institutions through agricultural activities.

**Local stakeholders and companies were empowered** with information and knowledge **leading to various benefits**, including increased yields, reduced production costs, enhanced resilience to climate change, long-term sustainability, diversification, improved market access, better marketability, compliance with social and labour rights, and compliance with regulations.



## DEMO FIELDS & FIELD DAYS

**31**  
Demo Fields  
&  
Field Days



**3477**  
registered  
participations on  
Field Days

### BEST PRACTICES PROMOTED

- ✓ Crop rotation and crop diversification
- ✓ Conservation tillage and soil conservation
  - ✓ Variety choice
- ✓ Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
  - ✓ Efficient irrigation
  - ✓ Precision agriculture
  - ✓ Organic agriculture



"When cultivating soya, we shouldn't just think about today's income but the benefits for the future. By implementing the demonstration platforms with the support of Donau Soja we have been able to demonstrate that no-till technology, which involves minimal tillage even in dry years, can produce competitive yields."

**Gheorghe Panfil**  
Farmer from Moldova

## SUCCESS STORY | DONAU SOJA DEMO FIELDS AND FIELD DAYS

### Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Donau Soja's commitment to promoting sustainable practices is evident in the regular organisation of demonstration fields in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. These fields serve as living laboratories for testing, analysing, and disseminating best practices in soybean production, aligning with Donau Soja/Europe Soya Standard recommendations and requirements. The demo fields act as practical showcases of sustainable agriculture techniques.

A distinctive feature of these fields is the collaborative effort involving local, regional, and international experts, as well as input providers. R&D institutions, advisory services, seed companies, and providers of various agricultural inputs join forces, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to promoting sustainable soybean production. This is evidenced by the adoption of safe approaches.

The Donau Soja demonstration fields not only testify to the organisation's dedication but also function as dynamic meeting places during the annual Donau Soja Field Days. These events have become pivotal forums, attracting hundreds of farmers each year. Here, practical demonstrations unfold, offering on-the-ground insights into the implementation of best practices, in line with Donau Soja/Europe Soya Standard requirements.

The success of Donau Soja's demo fields implemented within the Strategic Partnership is quantifiable and impressive. In Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina alone, over the course of **12** Donau Soja Field Days, a total of **2257** participants and **67** partners have actively engaged in knowledge exchange. The reach became even wider with the introduction of new format-[online field days](#) and [recommendations for farmers](#).

In the face of global agricultural challenges, Donau Soja's success story stands tall, showcasing the possibilities when dedication, collaboration, and sustainability converge in the pursuit of a greener and more resilient future.



## SUCCESS STORY | COOPERATION WITH INSTITUTE SELECTIA

### Moldova

Within Strategic Partnership and DevRAM Project, the "Selectia" Field Crops Research Institute in Balti began a transformative journey in collaboration with Donau Soja, a partnership that has resulted into a capacity development success story for both "Selectia" and Moldova's agriculture sector.

The institute's scientists, dedicated to advancing agricultural practices, conducted experiments on crop rotations, permanent crops, and various tillage and fertilisation systems, establishing themselves as a credible research partner. In 2018, a milestone was reached as the first Soya Field Day materialised with Donau Soja's support. The subsequent establishment of soya demonstration platforms in 2019, facilitated by Donau Soja, allowed the institute to import soya varieties from neighbouring countries - Serbia, Romania, and Bulgaria. This initiative not only fortified local soybean varieties but also empowered farmers with informed choices, enhancing crop resilience. Field Days evolved into crucial gatherings, attracting hundreds of farmers keen on learning about over 30 soybean types. Local soybeans, proven to thrive in Moldova's conditions and offer robust yields, gained popularity. Many farmers embraced these varieties, cultivating and producing their own soya seeds.

The institute also received modern equipment, from planters to seed-sorting machines, enhancing research efficacy. Embracing Donau Soja's standards, the institute joined the Protein Partnership, undergoing quality checks.

Post-DevRAM project, the institute sustained knowledge sharing through seminars and workshops, leveraging a modern classroom furnished by DevRAM. Positioned as a knowledge hub, it became irreplaceable for farmers in the northern region. Donau Soja's commitment to investing in people became evident as the institute's scientists benefited from opportunities to attend conferences and study visits abroad. This not only elevated their expertise but also contributed to the institute's recognition internationally.

Looking ahead, the "Selectia" institute is poised to integrate into the National Seed Research and Production Centre, a testament to its remarkable evolution. Donau Soja is eager to continue this fruitful collaboration, fostering sustainable practices and innovation in Moldova's agricultural landscape.



## SUCCESS STORY | FACILITATING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE IN CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

### Ukraine

Closing the yield gap and introducing sustainable practices were identified as major challenges in Ukraine, alongside the illegal use of GM seeds in production. Donau Soja's journey in facilitating change related to these challenges is a compelling success story marked by strategic adaptations and impactful initiatives.

Initially championing sustainable agricultural practices and advocating for non-GM production, the organisation successfully organised practical demonstrations and innovative field days, including the largest one in Ukraine held on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2019, in collaboration with the local agriculture holding. **Soya Field Day 2019**, with over 290 participants, served as an independent platform to assess the potential of the top 60 non-GM commodity soybean varieties, both local and foreign, across different maturity groups. The event also offered practical sessions, an opportunity to meet experts in the farming sector, and a chance to witness agricultural machinery in operation.

However, faced with the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak and later the war in Ukraine, and with physical gatherings not being possible and safe, Donau Soja swiftly pivoted its strategy. The introduction of the **Soya Discussion Club**, an online initiative, became a pivotal move. During more than 15 meetings from 2020 to 2023, the club brought together experts, scientists, and farmers to share practical insights on soybean cultivation in Ukraine's diverse agro-climatic conditions, especially those grappling with moisture deficits. This dynamic initiative quickly became a cornerstone of systematic online events, capturing significant interest among Ukrainian farmers.

The culmination of this success is evident in the development and publication of **Ukraine's Agri-climatic Atlas for soybean cultivation** by Donau Soja in 2022. Collaborating with esteemed institutions like the Institute of Water Problems and Land Reclamation and the Ukrainian Hydrometeorological Centre, the atlas consolidates vital information on observed climate changes and provides invaluable adaptation recommendations. Donau Soja's commitment to addressing challenges and fostering sustainable growth has undeniably left a lasting impact on soybean production in Ukraine.

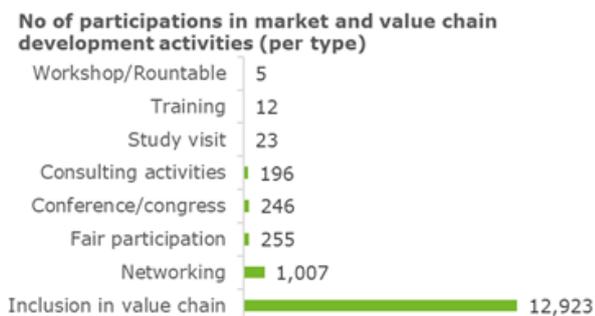


**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | MARKET AND VALUE CHAIN DEVELOPMENT**

**Milestones & results overview**



**14,667**  
registered participations  
in market and value chain development  
activities




**14**  
Protein Partnership Projects  
with 73 local partners in all 4 target  
countries




**4**  
new markets and market  
segments  
developed within the Strategic  
Partnership offer diversified and value-  
added opportunities to target country  
beneficiaries.



Donau Soja and target country  
companies benefited from participation on

**287 events**  
(47 organised and 240 participated)

**Timeline  
Most important market events**



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | MARKET & VALUE CHAIN DEVELOPMENT

### Strategic growth, market expansion and adding value

Over the course of 7 years of Programme implementation, Donau Soja expanded into **four new markets** (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Norway) and ventured into **four new market segments** (aquaculture, meat, plant-based food, and retail). This expansion provides diversified and value-added opportunities for beneficiaries in the target countries.

Under the Strategic Partnership for the period 2017-2023, Donau Soja facilitated the participation of beneficiaries in a total of **287 market and value chain development events**. Of these events, 47 were organised by Donau Soja, with an additional 240 events where both Donau Soja and Programme beneficiaries actively participated. The events encompassed both significant international and national gatherings (online and physical events), providing value chain participants with market-related knowledge and contacts. Some of most important events were Donau Soja networking events, study trips, buyers missions, stands at fairs and commodity exchanges and non-GMO events. This facilitated a broader network and created new business opportunities.

Throughout the Programme, Donau Soja documented a total of **14,667 participations in market and value chain development activities**. Broken down **by activity**, more than 12,923 participations were recorded, with a substantial contribution from small farmers supplying soybeans to certified Donau Soja value chains, particularly in the targeted country, Serbia. Over 1,000 participations were documented at networking events, 196 in consulting activities, 246 in conferences and congresses, 255 in fair participations, and over 100 in other activities such as promotions, study visits, trainings, and workshops. When categorised **by industry**, the breakdown is as follows: 13,117 were agricultural producers (84% small or medium-sized farmers); 412 participants were employed by collectors; 221 were employees of input suppliers; 166 by processors; 143 were from the NGO sector and advisory services, and 608 participants were engaged in various other industries and organisations. When divided **by country**, we registered 13,125 participations in Serbia (attributed to small-scale structures), followed by Ukraine with 1,093, Moldova with 292, and Bosnia and Herzegovina with 157. Regarding the **gender structure**, 24% of the participants in our market and value chain development activities were women.

As part of Strategic Partnership Donau Soja developed a new product: **Protein Partnership**- a programme to increase sustainable soya production in Europe, for Europe. Protein Partnerships are designed as an alternative to credits from overseas. Through 14 Protein Partnership projects from 2020 until 2023, we supported more than 70 local partners through training and certifying farmers and primary collectors and strengthening in this way the first link in the physical value chain.

Local stakeholders and companies, **empowered** with market insights, direct contacts, and a broader network, gained significant **benefits**. This included expanded market access, production tailored to market needs, and enhanced marketability. With access to information, local companies became more competitive, positioning themselves effectively. This also fostered sustainable practices, aligning with environmental and consumer preferences. Over time, this should lead to increased economic activities, job creation, and overall economic growth.

## SUCCESS STORY | LOCAL VALUE CHAIN DEVELOPMENT

### From fields to retail - empowering farmers and enabling consumer choices

Donau Soja is committed to creating diversified market opportunities and enhancing the resilience of local soybean producers, through parallel development of both local and international value chains. Within the Strategic Partnership, Donau Soja has achieved remarkable success in local market development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and Serbia.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova, Donau Soja faced challenges related to GMO usage, lack of public awareness, and an early-stage legal framework. Therefore, the organisation decided to pioneer the Non-GMO certification and labelling process, setting the standard with the Non-GM Danube Region Standard. In Bosnia, the initiative resulted in the introduction of non-GMO quality and product labelling for oil products and private-labelled eggs. Through strategic partnerships, campaigns, and public awareness initiatives, Bosnia became a regional leader in non-GMO labelling. This success story was shared with Moldova, where local plant-based food producer received support for Non-GMO labelling.

In Serbia, Donau Soja's focused on regional feed in non-GMO quality, sustainability, and deforestation-free production and gained recognition among local retailers. The implementation of the Donau Soja Standard, certifying non-GMO, sustainability, and European origin, led to the majority of Serbian retail private-labelled eggs being certified with the Donau Soja label. This not only provided local farmers with sustainable production practices but also protected them against unfair competition from imports, benefiting both farmers and informed consumers.

#### Market Surveys



## SUCCESS STORY | INTERNATIONAL VALUE CHAIN DEVELOPMENT

### Empowering local stakeholders through export facilitation

Internationally, Donau Soja has successfully promoted certified soybeans and soya products from target countries, achieving significant success with soybeans and soya products from Serbia and Ukraine.

When our journey began in Serbia, soybeans were already a part of the agricultural landscape, yet their potential remained confined to the domestic market. Recognising the possibilities and seeking to enhance the value of locally produced soybeans of non-GMO quality, especially in a self-sufficient Serbia, we implemented a mix of interventions. This comprehensive effort extended to the development of the value chain in the market, elevating awareness, strategic marketing projects, and establishing connections with key stakeholders. The fruits of these projects materialised in the remarkable export of almost 200,000 tonnes of certified soybeans and soya protein concentrate from Serbia to the demanding Aqua Nordic and plant-based food markets in Europe. In 2019, over half of the exported soybeans met Donau Soja's quality standards. This outcome was highly significant for private sector development. In the past few years, we managed to facilitate the export of SPC - soya protein concentrate - to the plant-based food market, which is crucial as the value of processing is retained in the country. In this process, more than 14,000 small and medium-sized farmers and 100 collectors and cooperatives benefited from gaining a new market that values sustainable non-GM production. Additionally, more than 50 companies engaged in certification and quality control, as well as logistics companies and input providers, also benefited from this development.

This year, our export success story extends to Ukraine, where Donau Soja certification and the dedicated efforts of our market development team have propelled Ukrainian soybeans into the highly competitive Plant-Based food market. Ukrainian soybeans are now the source of tofu consumed across Europe, reflecting a triumph in expanding markets and creating value for producers.

Additionally, two successful buyers missions to Moldova in 2020 and 2021 also resulted positively in the export of 250 tonnes of organic soya to Spain for the first time.

In conclusion, Donau Soja's success story is characterised by its proactive approach, strategic partnerships, and dedication to sustainable, non-GM production. The organisation's efforts have opened doors to international opportunities, benefiting farmers, producers, and consumers alike.



**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION**



In the development of inclusive market systems, effective communication is not merely a tool; it serves as the currency that purchases understanding, trust, and loyalty. In the complex landscape of stakeholders within an inclusive market system, clear and resonant communication becomes the key to fostering collaboration, building relationships, and driving sustainable growth.

Within the Strategic Partnership, marketing and communication activities served predominantly as supporting functions, ensuring widespread outreach to beneficiaries and promoting Donau Soja, as well as topics related to the Strategic Partnership, while also facilitating market and value chain development.

Traditional marketing and communication approaches, including 11 PR and marketing campaigns, numerous press articles, and press events, were complemented with TV and radio appearances. These channels proved particularly crucial in the target countries where television remains a significant means of disseminating information, especially to farmers.

Recognising the growing importance of digital media in today's world, Donau Soja invested considerable effort into developing and maintaining regularly updated web pages with locally adapted homepages, as well as social media channels.

Market transparency lies at the core of Donau Soja's goals. In addition to regular updates offered to project beneficiaries and all value chain stakeholders through newsletters, market reports, and daily price updates, Donau Soja introduced webinars on related topics and seized each event as an opportunity to enhance market transparency.

## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND CERTIFICATION

### Quality management

The quality management team in Vienna, as well as in Novi Sad, Kyiv and Chisinau offices, were responsible for the quality assurance of the Donau Soja, Europe Soya and Non-GM Danube Region Standards.

Within the framework of the Strategic Partnership the team managed the approval processes of new control bodies (CB), conducted annual training courses for the staff of control bodies, supported CBs in new certifications, provided translated documents to CBs and partners.

Further, Donau Soja facilitated 49 knowledge dissemination activities in the field of quality management and provided training with 469 participations in the target countries. In addition to offering access to information and knowledge, these activities equipped participants with new skills, resulting in the certification of 100 new auditors, with 43% of them being women. The acquired knowledge and skills facilitated their placement in new positions, enhancing their overall employability. At the start, in 2017, only three certification bodies were actively involved in offering Donau Soja certification within the countries. By the conclusion of the project, there were 16 active CBs in the target countries, marking a substantial growth of 81%. This development is crucial not only for business expansion and job creation but also for enhancing the accessibility of Donau Soja certification for local value chain stakeholders. This all facilitated certification of more than 167 companies (including group certification).



### Rigorous testing for compliance with our requirements



The Donau Soja Integrity Programme ensures compliance with our standards and the overall integrity of the entire system. This involves integrity audits conducted at partner organisations and CBs, witness audits, and laboratory analyses of soybeans and soya products. Throughout the Programme, Donau Soja conducted a total of 53 witness and integrity audits, along with 309 analyses of soybeans and soya products in Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and many more internationally. These analyses encompassed assessments for contaminations with GMO, general pesticide residues, and desiccation residues (Glyphosate residues and Diquat).

## SUCCESS STORY | LAND USE CHANGE PROJECT

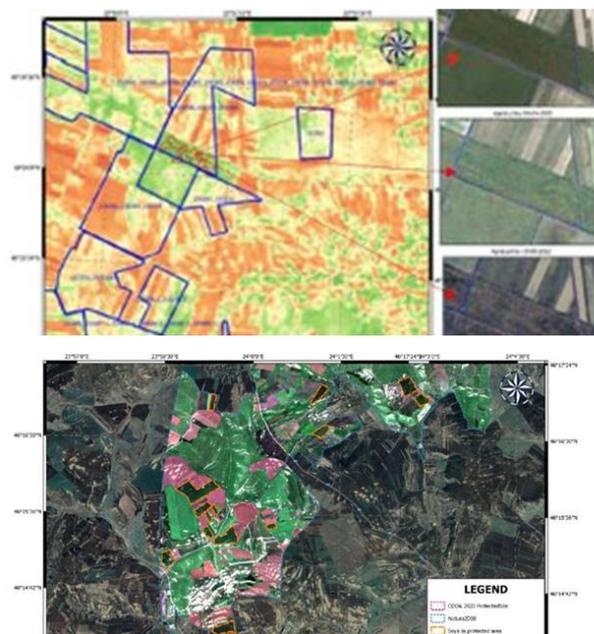
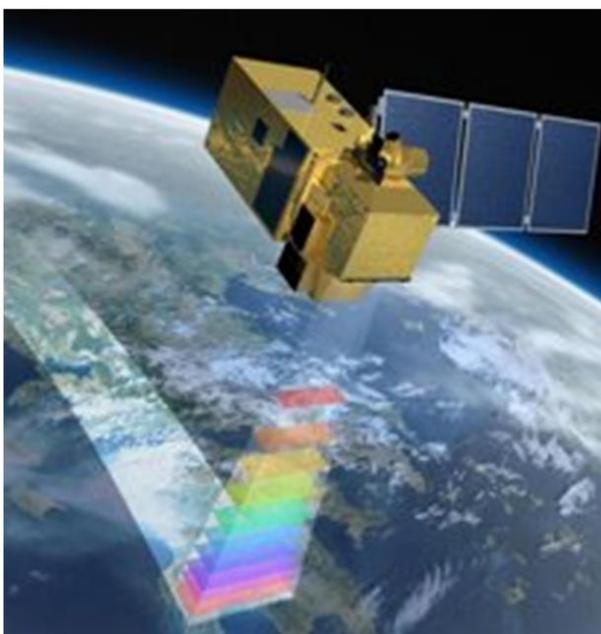
Deforestation and land use change for agriculture are taking place at an alarming rate. An estimated 420 million hectares of forests alone have been lost worldwide between 1990-2020 (according to Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations - FAO). This equals an area larger than the European Union.

Recognising this problem early on, Donau Soja from the beginning set a focus on banning deforestation and other land use change for the cultivation of soybeans. This means that Donau Soja and Europe Soya certified soybeans can only be grown on cropland that was dedicated to agricultural use no later than the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2008. With this strict non-conversion requirements, the Donau Soja standards are intended to relieve pressure on vulnerable ecosystems in Europe and overseas.

Almost a decade after the Donau Soja standard was established, we can see that the topic gains traction. An important step towards deforestation-free supply chains is the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), which becomes applicable on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 2024. Donau Soja welcomes regulatory step although it comes with a few flaws, most importantly the limitation to forests leaving out other vulnerable ecosystems.

The Donau Soja and Europe Soya Standard are among the standard schemes best prepared to support companies in the implementation of the EUDR and beyond legal requirements. An important aspect is the credibility of the Donau Soja and Europe Soya certification system. The risk based Donau Soja inspection system with independent 3<sup>rd</sup> party audits and the Donau Soja integrity programmes assure rigid verification of the Donau Soja and Europe Soya Standard requirements related to deforestation and land use change.

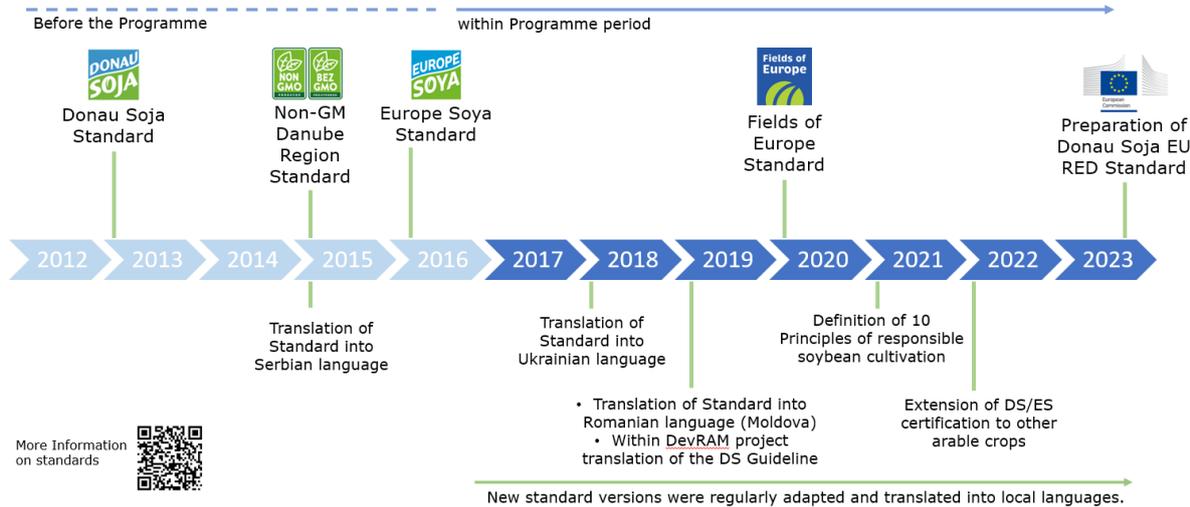
Within the Strategic Partnership, and as part of the integrity programme Donau Soja conducted detailed analyses of satellite data of Donau Soja and Europe Soya cultivation areas and fields (e.g. in Ukraine and Serbia). With this it was possible to assess and detect deforestation and conversion by comparison of vegetation 2007 vs. 2020, using vegetation indices (e.g. NDVI (Normalised difference vegetation index), EVI (Enhanced Vegetation Index), or others).



### Standard Development

The Donau Soja and Europe Soya Standard are constantly being improved and new requirements are being implemented based on best practices, market needs or changes in regulatory frameworks. New standard versions were adapted and translated to local languages.

#### Donau Soja Standards Development



### Donau Soja / Europe Soya Standard recognition and acknowledgement

The recognition of standards and sustainability benchmarking is crucial for promoting their values and increasing the usage of certified goods. Therefore, throughout the Strategic Partnership, Donau Soja has diligently worked to achieve independent evaluations, acknowledgments, and recognitions from reputable institutions and organisations.

The Donau Soja and Europe Soja Standards have been acknowledged as sustainable soya sourcing standards by a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including national soya initiatives, industry associations, scientific institutions, and NGOs. The positive recognition and recommendations stem from the credible Donau Soja and Europe Soya standard system, which establishes strict criteria for standards along with a high level of assurance and a reliable traceability system.

|  |  |   |  |   |   |  |
|--|--|---|--|---|---|--|
| <br>Donau Soja / Europe Soya is accepted by FEFAC as one of 18 sustainable sourcing standards.<br>Europe   | <br>Danish Alliance for Responsible Soy recognises Donau Soja / Europe Soya as one of the standards that address the criteria for responsible soy sourcing.<br>Denmark | <br>Swedish Soy Dialogue accepts Donau Soja / Europe Soya as one of 4 sustainable soya sourcing standards.<br>Sweden        | <br>Swiss Soy Network defines Donau Soja / Europe Soya as one of 5 sustainable sourcing standards.<br>Switzerland            | <br>WWF Germany recommends Donau Soja / Europe Soya as one of 4 sustainable soya sourcing standards.<br>Germany     | <br>Greenpeace Austria rated Donau Soja as „reliable and sustainable“ product label.<br>Austria   | <br>Donau Soja stands for strictly controlled regional and non-GM soya, with individual criteria going beyond this. There is a room for improvement in pesticide use and crop rotation. Greenpeace rates Donau Soja as trustworthy.<br>* translated into English by Donau Soja |
| <br>UK Roundtable on Sustainable Soya assessed and recommends Donau Soja / Europe Soya as one of 10 sustainable soya sourcing standards.<br>United Kingdom | <br>Sustainable Agriculture Initiative benchmarked Donau Soja / Europe Soja at FSA Silver Equivalent level.<br>Europe  | <br>Thünen Institut Germany recommends Donau Soja / Europe Soya as one of 6 sustainable soya sourcing standards.<br>Germany | <br>IUCN Netherlands recommends Donau Soja / Europe Soya as one of 4 sustainable soya sourcing standards.<br>The Netherlands | <br>VLOG recognises Donau Soja / Europe Soya certification as equivalent to VLOG standard certification.<br>Germany | <br>The Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) recognises Donau Soja / Europe Soya as one of 3 responsible soy sourcing standards.<br>Europe | <br>Donau Soja / Europe Soya are recognised as standard for soybean primary production within the QS-add-on module „Purchase of deforestation-free soy“.<br>Germany  |

More information

## Multicrop

In 2022, Donau Soja started to investigate options to develop the Donau Soja and Europe Soya Standard into a multicrop system, drawing on experience and learnings gained from the implementation of our own soya standard systems and the involvement in the development of a European food and feed standard (*Fields of Europe*). The extension of the certification system to other arable crops than soya aimed to 1) provide an opportunity for Donau Soja and Europe Soya farmers to participate in the certification system with their other crops, 2) to provide certified companies with additional opportunities in new markets (e.g. biofuel sector) and 3) to further develop the standard into the direction of plant-based food.

In its endeavour to further the develop its certification system towards a multi-crop approach, Donau Soja aimed to align with relevant regulatory frameworks and market initiatives. The Renewable Energy Directive provides a relevant framework for the certification of sustainably produced biomass, and therefore is essential. Stakeholder engagement in the area of feed and food market initiatives were another relevant source of input (e.g. for the development of the European feed and food standard *Fields of Europe*)

As a first step towards a multi-crop approach, Donau Soja created the possibility for certification of other arable crops than soya under the Donau Soja and Europe Soya certification. As a result of the multicrop development efforts, draft documents for the Donau Soja EU RED Standard are available in January 2024. This standard is intended to allow certified partners to distribute their products on the biofuel markets, thereby providing existing Donau Soja and Europe Soya certified partners with an additional market opportunity for by-products of soybean processing. At the same time, the standard provides an opportunity to market other arable crops (e.g. rapeseed, maize).



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT AND POLICY

In the intervention field of the business environment and policy framework, the goal was to contribute to the creation of a conducive and effective business environment and policy frameworks, including support mechanisms and regulations for soya production and trade. Advocacy initiatives primarily focused on target countries but were not limited solely to them; they also addressed the international (EU) regulatory framework. This approach was crucial to ensure that fair and competitive conditions were provided for the target countries that are not part of the EU.

Regular exchange and communication with governmental representatives have been integral parts of the Strategic Partnership activities in all countries. Government representatives and other

important public and private stakeholders were regularly updated on developments related to Donau Soja topics. The focus of the activities was tailored to the specific needs of the target countries.

After successfully implementing Non-GMO Guidelines into the regulatory framework of Bosnia and Herzegovina before the start of the Strategic Partnership, efforts were made to jointly promote the non-GMO label and products in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbia already has restrictive GMO legislation, so regular exchanges on actual topics were conducted as a routine activity. A significant success was achieved in Moldova and Ukraine, where the focus was on setting up a regulatory framework for GMOs.



## SUCCESS STORY | TRANSFORMING GMO REGULATION IN UKRAINE

When Donau Soja started implementation of the Strategic Partnership in Ukraine, it was faced with a challenge – the widespread illegal use of genetically modified organisms despite an official ban on GM seeds and cultivation.

Recognising the imperative for enforced GMO regulation, Donau Soja Ukraine started a crucial partnership with the local law firm. This alliance facilitated analysis of Ukrainian draft laws on GMO regulation in comparison to EU standards. Armed with a comprehensive understanding, Donau Soja presented a compelling case to Ukrainian authorities, laying the groundwork for a potential EU Twinning Project that could harmonise GMO regulations. The important milestone was reached in collaboration with the Agent Green Association. Analyses of soybean crops and supermarket products to detect the presence of illegal and unlabelled GMOs were conducted. This was part of a campaign that culminated in a press conference that captured the attention of government officials, state control authorities, and agricultural businesses, underscoring the urgent need for stricter regulations and enhanced consumer education. A decisive step forward was taken through a sociological survey in late 2018, revealing a prevalent negative public perception of GMOs in Ukraine. Armed with compelling data, Donau Soja strategically lobbied the government, emphasizing the importance of harmonising GMO legislation and advocating for trustworthy non-GMO labelling. Donau Soja's commitment remained in the subsequent years, with active participation in governmental working groups, collaboration with the EU Twinning project, and engagement with business associations. The efforts extended to open letters, meetings with deputy ministers, and cooperation with state inspection authorities to combat illegal GMO cultivation.

As a result, Ukraine adopted the Law on the EU-based GM regulation (23<sup>rd</sup> of August 2023). Donau Soja contributed to the process and succeeded with the implementation of the opt-out principle and EU regulatory system of GMO labelling including conditions for the development of voluntary non-GMO labelling systems for animal-based products.

Strategic Partnership success story in Ukraine is a testament to the transformative power of strategic advocacy, collaboration, and public awareness. The journey not only influenced legislative changes but also reshaped the narrative around GMOs, laying the foundation for a more sustainable and transparent agricultural future in Ukraine.



## SUCCESS STORY | IMPACT ON MOLDOVA'S AGRICULTURE POLICIES

Facilitating positive changes in business environment was a strong focus of both the Strategic Partnership and the DevRAM Project in Moldova. One of the first steps was to prepare a comprehensive review report with the help of the Environment Agency Austria. This report analysed the regulatory, legislative, and policy framework for quality standards, with a specific focus on biosafety and non-genetically modified organisms. The report became the cornerstone for subsequent initiatives by the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development, and Environment and the Moldovan Biosafety Authority.

These efforts materialised in the form of a Law No.152, which was adopted by the Parliament on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2022. This landmark legislation established a regulatory and institutional framework governing the breeding, testing, use, trading, import, and export of genetically modified organisms. Notably, it incorporated precautionary measures to safeguard human health and the environment, reflecting a commitment to responsible agricultural practices. Anticipated to take effect in 2024, this law provides Moldova with the capacity to restrict or prohibit GMOs within its borders or specific regions, and the nation's ability to make informed decisions about its agricultural landscape.

In parallel, within the DevRAM Project, Donau Soja facilitated the development of the National Action Plan for soybeans (NAP) with all key stakeholders. To follow up on the recommendations of the NAP, a collaborative appeal by Donau Soja and four agricultural enterprises for support to small and medium-sized soybean farmers was submitted. This appeal led to changes including amendments in Government Decision No. 455/2017, expanding the eligibility for state subsidies to include educational and research-innovation institutions in the agricultural field. Additionally state subsidies were introduced for legume production and purchase of local seeds. Furthermore, DS played a pivotal role in enhancing the National Monitoring Plan concerning GMO official controls. By submitting letters to the National Food Safety Agency, Donau Soja advocated for a plan, envisioning the collection of 35 samples from soybean stocks intended for sowing and imported soybeans in 2023.

The success story extends into the field of consumer awareness. Donau Soja responded to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry's call to contribute to the implementation of GMO-free labelling on food products of animal origin. Leveraging experiences from Serbia and other European countries, DS organised internal training that laid the foundation for modifications to the Consumer Information Law. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April 2023, the Parliament voted to allow voluntary labelling of poultry, pork, and products containing over 50% meat, as well as eggs, with the reassuring words 'fed without genetically modified organisms' or 'fed without GMOs.'

This showcases Donau Soja's role in shaping a progressive and responsible agri-food landscape for the Republic of Moldova, setting the stage for sustainable growth and consumer confidence.



**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND CONSULTANCY**

Within this Strategic Partnership intervention field, Donau Soja supported local partners from target countries in participating in international projects. The initial goal was to assist local partners in at least two international projects, but this was surpassed, resulting in the successful completion of four international projects.

One notable achievement was the Moldovan DevRAM project, implemented in collaboration with EU and ADA from 2018 to 2021. As emphasised in previous reports, the scopes of the two projects, namely the Strategic Partnership Programme and the DevRAM Project, were highly similar. Consequently, to prevent any overlap, a significant portion of the costs and activities were financed and reported through the Moldovan project. The work in Moldova, following the closure of the DevRAM project,

seamlessly continues as part of the ongoing Strategic Partnership.

In addition to the DevRAM project, Donau Soja played a significant role in facilitating the participation and collaboration of local partners in various Research and Innovation projects. These initiatives encompassed the OK-NET-Ecofeed project, the Legumes Translated project, and the Haberlandt Scholarship for Soybean Research. Moreover, Donau Soja actively engaged in joint initiatives with stakeholders from target countries, such as the Cybele project and the Internet of Food & Farm (IoF) project. Additionally, Donau Soja provided support to the European Soybean Improvement Network (ESIN), an open group comprising soybean breeders and scientists from diverse fields related to soybean production and its use in Europe.

4



**Local partners were supported to participate and collaborate on 4 international projects**



**DevRAM**  
DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS  
IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

**OK NET**  
ecofeed 



Legumes Translated



Legume Hub

Haberlandt  
Scholarship  
for  
Soybean  
Research



## 5

### **Donau Soja - ADA Strategic Partnership LESSONS LEARNED PROJECT MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION**

## **LESSONS LEARNED AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP| LESSONS LEARNED**

### **Shaping strategic approach and improving the work**

The journey through the Strategic Partnership has been marked by lessons that have significantly shaped our approach and understanding. In this summary, we present key takeaways that have shaped our strategy for both current phase and project proposal for the next phase.

#### **Regional tailor-made approach**

Recognising the unique characteristics of each region is crucial for the success of our initiatives. Our experience underscores the importance of adopting a regional tailor-made approach that respects local needs, situations and practices. Tailoring our strategies to suit specific regional needs enhances the relevance and effectiveness of our interventions, fostering stronger partnerships and community engagement. Having local teams and offices is key to regional tailor-made approach.

#### **Knowledge exchange between countries**

Cross-border knowledge exchange has been a catalyst for innovation and growth. By facilitating the sharing of best practices and experiences between countries, we have cultivated a rich pool of insights. This collaborative approach has not only accelerated learning but has also strengthened regional networks, fostering a sense of unity in pursuing common goals.

#### **Increasing inclusive participation and wider reach**

One of the key lessons learned from our programme is the importance of accessibility. Creating pathways for our stakeholders to easily engage with our interventions fosters inclusivity and ensures that the benefits reach a broader audience. We've learned that by removing barriers, we empower a broader community and foster widespread participation and engagement. This includes affordability as well. Our experiences have underscored the need to develop cost-effective strategies that consider the economic realities of targeted communities.

#### **Risk management - crises situation**

Within implementation, the Programme encountered two major crises: the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Key lessons learned in risk management include the adoption of agile management principles and the maintenance of flexibility in Programme activity plans, allowing for swift adjustments when necessary. Avoiding overly strict details in activity planning within Programme documents proved beneficial, enabling adaptability to unforeseen challenges. A comprehensive beneficiary approach, along with close cooperation and regular contact with beneficiaries, facilitated the seamless continuation of activities. Additionally, the effective use of modern communication technologies and IT tools played a crucial role, ensuring real-time information exchange and contributing to proactive risk management strategies.

#### **Easier Programme structure**

Our experiences have highlighted the benefits of creating Programme structures that are streamlined, efficient, and easily adaptable. Therefore, in the new proposal number of component is reduced from nine to three and a clear outcome and output planning has been developed as an orientation for monitoring and evaluation. Also, the budget was

summarised based on cost type (vs. activity in phase one) which should lead to better planning, easier reporting and hopefully less reallocations.

### **Focus on indicators and Market System Development Approach**

Focus on indicators provides a measurable path to success and is essential for measuring the impact of our initiatives and adapting our strategies in real-time. By aligning our efforts with inclusive market system development principles, we can better understand the dynamics of targeted market systems and strategically intervene to catalyse positive change.

### **Digitalisation**

Embracing digitalisation has proven to be a game-changer. Incorporating technology not only enhances efficiency in data management but also facilitates real-time communication and widespread knowledge sharing. We learned about the transformative impact of digital tools in creating a connected and informed ecosystem, emphasising the importance of integrating digitalisation as an integral component of our projects.

### **Start with lower requirements and then build up**

Initiating projects with a focus on non-GMO crops provides a pragmatic entry point for engaging with farmers (e.g. in BiH and Moldova). This approach resonates with their existing practices, making the transition to sustainable agriculture more accessible.

### **Market push and pull strategy are equally important**

Enabling the supply side alone is insufficient for the successful and sustainable development of value chains. A lesson learned is the necessity of an equally robust 'pull' strategy, which involves supporting demand. This entails a balanced approach that encompasses the entire value chain, rather than exclusively focusing on the 'push' strategy, which supports supply.

### **Grow “beyond” soya**

Based on feedback from the market and evaluation, Donau Soja expands its certification standards with the introduction of the Multicrop Standard. This new standard, aligned with Donau Soja requirements, will cover a broader crop scope with modular add-ons to address specific market needs. The transition to a wider crop scope will be gradual, with the ongoing inclusion of new crops alongside soya. This will move from certification of just one crop to the introduction of sustainable agronomic practices on the whole farm and in this way contribute to both economic and environmental sustainability.



## **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP | PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT & ADMINISTRATION**

ADA funded Strategic Partnership Programme "Building sustainable, inclusive, and well-functioning value chains for Non-GM soya and organic soya in Moldova, Ukraine, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina", contract number ADA 2530-00/2017. This Programme was implemented by Donau Soja Organisation in period from January 2017 until February 2024. The total project value amounts to EUR 9 million, with equal financial contributions from ADA and Donau Soja.

### **Developments that influenced the implementation of the Strategic Partnership**

Two major challenges for implementation were the outbreak of COVID-19 and enforced quarantine measures, as well as the war in Ukraine. Donau Soja reacted promptly by introducing alternative ways of working (online), supporting team members and Programme beneficiaries without breaks in implementation. Nevertheless, these events resulted in the need to adapt the Programme's timeframe, and the implementation was prolonged twice without a budget increase.

First prolongation: In July 2020, ADA and Donau Soja agreed to extend the Strategic Partnership Programme for 20 months, starting from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2022 until the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2023. The main reasons for slower implementation were related to the unexpected outbreak of corona virus and follow-up measures, and also partly in slower generation of income than planned and projected for the Strategic Partnership Programme, so the funds could not be matched.

Second prolongation: In early 2022, the war in Ukraine started. This unexpected situation resulted in a second prolongation approved by ADA on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July 2022. The Programme was prolonged for 6 months from August 2023 to February 2024.

As announced in the Programme Document, the Grant Agreement for implementation of the DevRAM Project "Increasing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector through integration to domestic and global value chains in particular in the soya sector" started in April 2018. Based on an agreement between ADA and DS, the project further strengthened the Moldova component of this regionally organised Strategic Partnership. As the scope of the two projects was very similar, to avoid any misunderstandings or overlapping it has been agreed that the majority of costs were financed through the DevRAM project. To ensure the completeness of this Strategic Partnership Report, the results of DevRAM were integrated. Detailed Report on activities conducted in Moldova was presented in the Narrative report for DevRAM Action 2017/389-857//ADA Contract Number: 6541-01/2017. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2021, the project was completed.

### **Programme management**

Overall management of the Programme was in line with the Grant Agreement and Terms and Conditions agreed with the Austrian Development Agency.

When the Programme started only Austrian and Serbian offices existed. Functional and efficient local offices and legal entities in Ukraine and Moldova were established within the Programme. Serbian Office was enlarged to cover activities both in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Upon closing of the DevRAM project, Ukrainian office took content responsibility and line management for the Moldovan office. All four offices developed qualified project teams that implemented all interventions and activities. Activities were implemented both locally (Components 1-5) in the target countries as well as internationally (Components 6-9) for the benefit of target country beneficiaries. Besides giving guidance and general infrastructure (e.g. IT software and other tools), the Donau Soja office in Vienna was also involved in activity implementation jointly with colleagues

from the target countries.

Programme activities were successfully implemented as a result of regular planning and agile management allowing adaptation to changing environment and circumstances. The International and component Jour Fixes were used as platforms for information, knowledge exchange and project updates. Management meetings have been held on a regular basis. ADA SP activities were operationally discussed within the strategic meetings of the Programme Committee and the Executive management meetings, while strategic decisions were taken within the Budget and Strategy Committee and regular Board meetings. The progress was regularly presented within the Donau Soja General Assembly.

Internal guidelines and tools for administrative requirements (for example: travel rules, procurement rules and templates) were developed to ensure smooth implementation and administration. All new team members were regularly trained on requirements and gained close insight into the ADA Strategic Partnership, its requirements, and their (implementation and administration) duties and responsibilities within the project (planning, implementation monitoring, storage of evidence, time tracking, visibility, etc).

Work on cross-cutting (gender, environmental and social) activities and challenges was continuous throughout the whole Programme. Gender Audit was conducted as planned and recommendations were implemented. Exchange with ADA on EGSIM (Environmental, Gender Social Impact Management) issues took place and it was confirmed that recommendations were implemented.

Visibility of the Strategic Partnership and cooperation with ADA was continuously ensured by using the cooperation logos and communicating support at every public appearance, through social networks, and online communication. Several focused articles were published to communicate Programme activities and its achievements.

Regular exchange and consultations with responsible ADA management and department representatives were organised for steering purposes and for diverse exchange needs that occurred during implementation.

Programme evaluation was successfully conducted by the "Institute for Territorial Economic Development (InTER)" from Belgrade, Serbia and the recommendations were included in a proposal for the new phase.

The proposal for the next phase was submitted to the ADA in June 2023 and approved by the ADA Supervisory Board on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2023.

### **Administration**

Besides this Final Report, Donau Soja submitted 14 interim reports (both narrative and financial). All reports were submitted in due time, according to the templates agreed with ADA. Those reports can be considered as addendums containing details related to this final report.

Annual Programme audits were conducted by NWT Wirtschaftsprüfung & Steuerberatung in 2017 and, from 2018 by BDO Austria GmbH and submitted to ADA.

In the summer of 2018, ADA identified certain omissions in Donau Soja's financial reporting. The subsequent additional re-audit for the period 2017 and HY1 2018 not only resolved the issues but also served as a catalyst for Donau Soja's substantial learning, leading to significant improvements in processes and reporting, ensuring subsequent reports were seamlessly accepted without any complications.

## **Budget**

Within agreed Programme period, Donau Soja spent the agreed budget of 8,998,300 EUR. The Budget was planned for five implementation years, but it was spent in seven (see Developments that influenced the implementation of the Strategic Partnership and no cost prolongations). The Budget was 50% financed through ADA Grant and 50% through Donau Soja's own contribution. Until the completion of the Programme, DS additionally invested in the Strategic Partnership and contributed an additional 193,506 EUR for which it did not seek funds from the donor.

## ABBREVIATIONS

**ADA** – Austrian Development Agency

**BiH** - Bosnia and Herzegovina

**CB(s)** – Control body (-ies)

**CO<sub>2</sub>** – Carbon Dioxide

**DevRAM** - Development of Rural Areas in the Republic of Moldova (Project name)

**DS** – Donau Soja

**DS/ES** – Donau Soja/Europe Soya

**EU** – European Union

**EUR**- Euro

**EUDR** – European Deforestation Regulation

**FiBL** - Research Institute of Organic Agriculture

**GHG** – Greenhouse gases

**GM** – Genetically Modified

**GMO** – Genetically Modified Organism

**Ha** – hectare(s)

**IT** – Information Technology

**LCA** – Life Cycle Assessment

**NGO(s)** – non-governmental organisation(s)

**R&D** – Research and Development

**RCNS** – Regional Centre Novi Sad

**SDG** – Sustainable Development Goal

**SEE** – South-East Europe

**SP** – Strategic Partnership

**SPP** – Strategic Partnership Programme

**t** – tonnes

**VC** – Value Chain

**VCD** – Value Chain Development