

SUCCESS STORY

HIGH-VALUE VITICULTURE ENABLES TWO GENERATIONS TO RETURN HOME FROM EU

USAID and Sweden’s investments in winegrowing and tourism have created a thriving sector which provides income for two generations of entrepreneurs, and acts as a source of inspiration for the Moldovan diaspora. Families across borders

Every second family in Moldova has a relative that works abroad, and in the EU, salaries are three times higher than in Moldova. Tudor Agaci used to be an agronomist, but searching for a better life, he moved to Italy and worked as an unqualified laborer for over 11 years.



Photo credit: Maxim Ciumas
Photo caption: Tudor Agaci and his daughter Tatiana Harbuz in the Dealu Morilor winery

Despite being far from home, and far from his profession, the passion for winegrowing still flowed through his veins. Each autumn, Tudor would take unpaid leave, and volunteer at an Italian wine factory where he could apply his knowledge and learn the modern techniques and know-how of high-value agriculture.

The passion for winegrowing catalyzed the decision to return home

When Tudor decided to return to Moldova, and his home village of Buteni, he considered himself an old man. Despite this, he found the energy to put the knowledge and specialized equipment he bought in Italy to work. “I planted two hectares each of Chardonnay, Muscat Ottonel, and Cabernet Sauvignon vines. Finally, in retirement, I could work again as an agronomist” he says.

As his small winery began to emerge, so did the vigor of his youth. “I feel like viticulture is in my blood,”

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Tudor Agaci,
winemaker at Dealu Morilor winery

After two years, Mr. Agaci convinced his daughter Tatiana to also return from Italy to the ancestral village and help him make the shift from low value vine-growing to high value wine production, in line with western standards. Bottled wine sells for four times more than bulk produced wines, and attracts consumers and visitors from high-value markets in the EU and Asia.

The legend behind the winery

Dealu Morilor (which translates as The Hills of the Mills) winery is located in Buteni village in the center of Moldova, surrounded by windmills. According to legend, the seven hills surrounding the village were home to a great concentration of 16 windmills, and people would come from all over to grind their grains into flour. The story goes on to say that the best bread and placinte (Moldovan traditional food) in the whole country were made here in Buteni, by a woman called Parascovia, who worked at the mill. This story is echoed on the winery's wine labels, showing an ancient map of the region and local agricultural traditions.

Tatiana hopes to revive the ancient legend for a new type of visitor when small winery opens its doors to tourists. "We are working to improve our tourism facilities and make the best placinte in the region in the memory of Parascovia from the mills. Be our guest at Dealu Morilor and discover the best wine paired with placinte" she says.

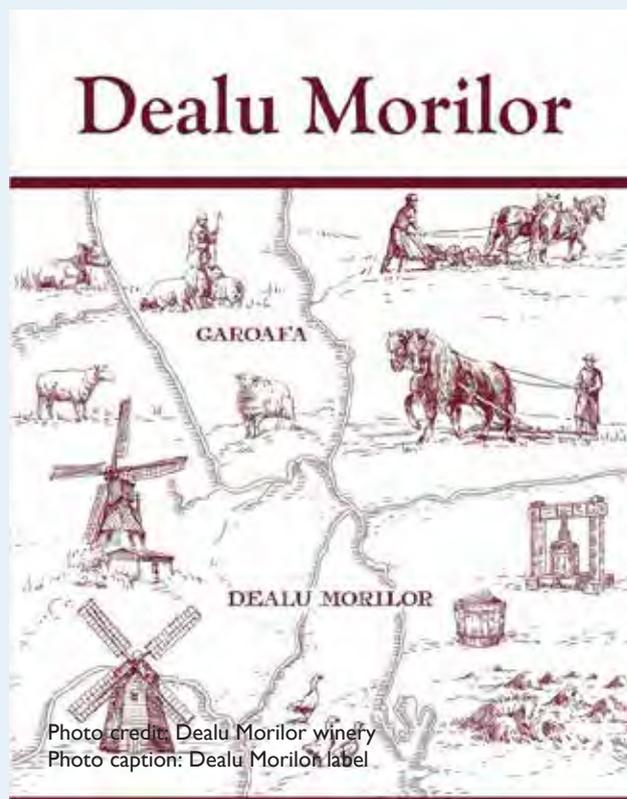
Investing in modern equipment to increase wine quality

Tatiana and Tudor are beneficiaries of the Association of Small Winemakers Mentorship program, implemented with support from the USAID and Sweden-funded Moldova Competitiveness project. Dealu Morilor winery received modern equipment and technical support to build its capacities in wine making, resulting in the production of the first bottles of bottled wine. The wines produced from the 2017 grape harvest were picked by hand from Tudor's vineyards, which are now 10 years old, the most favorable age for the production of quality wines.

Dealu Morilor has become more than just a successful emerging wine business, it is an inspiration for the whole Moldovan Diaspora. With just a small investment from MCP, two generations from a small village have turned their talent and passion for wine making into a successful brand, built on the deep heritage of their roots.

"With the support of USAID and Sweden, we feel we can raise our children at home in Moldova. I can be close to my father and help him with his passion of vine growing and in the same time grow the love of the land inside my three boys."

Tatiana Harbuz,
owner of Dealu Morilor winery



USAID has been investing in Moldova's wine industry for over a decade, supporting a heritage industry to overcome the shocks created by two Russian embargoes, and the resulting impact on the rural economy. MCP, funded by USAID and Sweden, launched the Association of Small Winemakers Mentorship Program, a peer to peer assistance activity where emerging new small wine producers are assisted by experienced winemakers and gain access to shared equipment, a marketing and promotion platform and unique market position in addition to new technical knowledge. Since its launch, the ASW mentorship program has enabled 22 small wineries to emerge and focus on high value, bottled wine production, creating economic development, stimulating job creation and providing credible opportunities for Moldovans stay and find success at home.