



Ertoba Farmers'
Association of
Samtskhe-Javakheti

2025 Summary

NEWSLETTER



Ertoba Farmers' Association of Samtskhe-Javakheti

As of 2025, it comprises 153 farms specializing in livestock farming, beekeeping, and potato production.

2025 budget : 368 413 GEL

Ertoba, in collaboration with GBDC and Fert, continues to support and strengthen farms in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Key achievements of 2025

Support for Agricultural Value Chains

Agricultural Vocational Training for Young People

Leadership training for Ertoba farmers

Registration of the Tenili Cheese Producers Association



A look back at Ertoba's 2025 General Assemblies



The Ertoba farmers' association holds a general assembly twice a year—an event that plays a key role in fostering member cohesion and cooperation, as well as ensuring the smooth operation of its activities.

The first general assembly of 2025 took place on February 8; the occasion served to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Ertoba association and to review the highlights of the past decade, the 2024 agricultural year, and planned projects for 2025 across its three areas of activity: livestock farming, beekeeping, and potato cultivation.

The second general assembly took place on November 15 ; it was an intensive working day structured around two main components.

- The first part was dedicated to a sectoral review of 2025, a presentation of the Ertoba structure, and a discussion of other current topics.
- The second part featured sector-specific discussions, allowing participants to address the challenges and difficulties farmers faced over the past year, as well as the changes, improvements, or actions they plan to implement on their farms in the short term.

A distinctive feature of Ertoba is that the farmers themselves manage the association; the GBDC technical team provides services tailored to their needs, with support from Fert.



In 2025, Ertoba organized a group purchase of small agricultural equipment based on needs identified by value chain committees. Farmer participation was voluntary. Consequently, eight pieces of equipment were offered to association members at preferential rates: four for livestock farming, three for beekeeping, and one for potato cultivation.

Additionally, the organization provided financial support in the form of co-financing to four collective projects. The goal of each activity is to reduce the farmers' workload and increase the profitability of their farms.



Leadership Trainings 2025



A new leadership training session for Ertoba farmers



Maia Kochalidze
Member of the Livestock Committee
and of the Board of Ertoba

« As leader of the farmers' association Ertoba, it is important for me to better understand how the farmer organization functions and to help guide the association's development in the right direction. The training sessions drew my attention to many interesting aspects: how to express my opinion effectively, how to assume a decision-making role as a leader, and how to cooperate with partners. I acquired active listening skills and gained a clearer understanding of the extent of the responsibility I bear as board of Ertoba. Leadership training helps us better define our role within the association. »

Since 2022, the GBDC technical group, in collaboration with the french agri-agency Fert, has developed a training program for lead farmers from the Ertoba association to raise awareness of the principles of association life and strengthen their skills. This program includes three days of theoretical training, during which farmers delve into the principles of association management, the role of the agricultural leader, and the qualities and techniques essential for agricultural leadership—all of which are assets for building constructive relationships with their peers.

In 2025, six meetings were organized for three groups, training 26 farmers from the livestock, beekeeping, and potato production sectors. The GBDC technical team also attended these training sessions. As part of this program, Eliso Tateshvili conducted training on the following topics:

- The leader: role and style;
- Active listening techniques;
- Producer organizations: objectives and functions;
- Producer organizations: objectives and functions;
- The viability of a producer organization;
- The operating environment of a producer organization;
- Establishing strong partnerships.

“ It is important to empower, motivate and involve farmers in decision-making; this will lay the foundations for successful, responsible and sustainable cooperative development in the region” – Eliso Tateshvili, trainer



A new agricultural vocational training program for rural youth

Agriculture is one of Georgia's most important sectors, yet it has faced significant challenges in recent years. Rural exodus hinders the establishment of young farmers, the development of innovative practices and investment in more competitive agriculture.

In 2025, Ertoba, GBDC and Fert jointly implemented a short-term training program for young people interested in agriculture. This training aimed to involve motivated young people in the agricultural sector, in order to transmit new knowledge and practical skills to them, to promote collaboration with farmers and to support future entrepreneurial initiatives.

The unique aspect of this program lies in the fact that, beyond theoretical instruction, participants had the opportunity to put their knowledge into practice and undertake internships within the farms of Ertoba member farmers, while starting and developing their own business projects.



"The agricultural training marked a turning point for me; it sparked my interest in the field and provided answers to the questions I had before participating. It allowed me to try my hand at farming and turn my ideas into reality—specifically, launching my own farm. It also piqued the interest of other young people who hadn't previously been involved in such activities.

As a farmer's son, I was curious to discover the different methods used on other farms. What stood out most for me during the training was the internship with farmers working in the area that interests me. I would tell my peers to look at this sector from a fresh perspective: agriculture allows you to bring a multitude of ideas and goals to life and, above all, offers the chance to run your own business."

Aleko Shavadze, training participant and farmer's son from the village of Rustavi.

Different learning processes



Theoretical training

117 hours of theoretical training on agronomic fundamentals (crop and livestock production), with a particular focus on developing economic and entrepreneurial skills.



Practice and internship

Practical field training with farmers from the Ertoba association: stays at host farms to gain insight into their activities and experiences. Study visit to the Swiss Agricultural School in the Caucasus.



Supporting business ideas

Studies and presentation of young people's agricultural activity projects to a jury. Awarding of grants for 4 projects: rabbit farming, a Chinese-style greenhouse, beekeeping, and butter and cheese production.



Registration of the Tenili Cheese Producers' Association

On December 15, 2025, Tenili cheese producers registered the "Tenili Cheese Producers" Association. For years, Ertoba, in collaboration with GBDC-Fert, has been working to promote the grouping of Tenili cheese producers, mutual cooperation, and, above all, the preservation of traditional techniques for making this cheese.



One of the association's main objectives is to protect the traditional production of Tenili cheese by establishing a geographical indication.



Furthermore, the association aims to promote Tenili cheese, preserve its sanitary and organoleptic quality, develop and promote agritourism, and foster young people's interest in production processes, among other objectives.

(...) The goal will be achieved by obtaining Geographical Indication status, thereby giving the product a unique character. This association is of vital importance to the region—economically, socially, and culturally. It is worth noting that it brings local producers together and creates a unique platform for preserving traditional know-how and production methods. Tenili cheese has become the true calling card of our village.

This initiative will foster job creation, spark interest among young people, and strengthen local roots. Tenili will be more than just a product; it will become part of the region's identity and drive the development of agritourism.

The Ertoba farmers' association and the GBDC technical group played a pivotal role in the creation of our own association. Thanks to their support, we were able to define a shared vision, meticulously plan every step, and unite. These two organizations also provided us with legal and organizational guidance. For us, Ertoba is an experienced partner that will support us on our journey toward excellence. This collaboration highlights the vital importance of solidarity and partnership among farmers. Thank you to them. Success to us all."



Activities of Tenili cheese producers in 2025

The year 2025 proved particularly successful and fruitful for Tenili cheese producers. With the support of Ertoba, GBDC-Fert and the Georgia-Swiss Intellectual Property Project' (GESIP), these producers developed a product specification — a prerequisite for registering Meskhetian Tenili cheese as a geographical indication, a process currently underway. The Tenili Cheese Producers Association aims to produce safe, high-quality Tenili cheese while upholding traditions and relying on internal, external, and self-monitoring control mechanisms

This year, as part of an initiative organized by the "GESIP-Georgia-Swiss Intellectual Property Project," representatives from the group visited several regions in France and Switzerland; there, they saw firsthand the value of production under designations of origin, the operations of associations and cooperatives, and the realities of zero-waste production and farmer cooperation.



Lamzira Zedginidze Mamulaidze

Farmer and member of the 'Tenili Cheese Producers Association' and 'Ertoba'.

"Our association was established to preserve the traditional production method and cultural heritage of Meskhetian Tenili cheese. Our goal is to help enhance the quality and recognition of this unique product, both domestically and internationally.

Obtaining Geographical Indication status will enable us to protect and promote our product. This will have a positive impact on local economic development and allow producers to establish a strong presence in the local market (...)



"The study visit to Switzerland, held from 4–11 May 2025 aimed to introduce representatives of farmers organizations for products with Geographical Indication to Swiss practices—covering value chain management, controls and certification, market monitoring and fight against counterfeiting, as well as product marketing and promotion.

It was interesting to observe the interconnection between geographical indications and agritourism, as well as the strong emphasis placed on quality. This visit was one of the factors that prompted the united group of Tenili cheese producers Association.

As a member and president of this association, I am delighted by the prospects and opportunities available to us to protect Tenili, a traditional cheese of our region. Furthermore, the association has set itself the goal of carrying out numerous interesting activities, which I hope to report in next year's summary newsletter.

The priority now is to actively put into practice—within the association—the knowledge gained during the study visit — particularly regarding quality control and comply with specifications".

Nora Melikidze,
member of Ertoba
and president of
the Tenili Cheese
Producers
Association



In addition to the trip to Switzerland, Tenili cheese producers—in collaboration with Ertoba and the GBDC—undertook a study visit to the Swiss Agrarian School Caucasus in the village of Sarkineti (Dmanisi municipality).

The farmers learned about the school's operations and toured the livestock farming and dairy processing unit located on the school campus. Beyond exploring the school's practices, the visit provided an opportunity for the farmers to discuss the promotion of Tenili cheese and outline future projects.



Finally, Tenili producers are actively collaborating with Ertoba and the GBDC technical group to increase production and improve milk quality, as well as to promote and market their farm products.

Through the group purchasing service, Tenili producers were able to obtain clay pots for packaging Tenili according to the traditional method. Additionally, the producers have collectively purchased hygiene products—such as teat protection and disinfection supplies—to meet consumer expectations.





The Hay Olympiad

An annual gathering of farmers dedicated to producing quality hay

For several years, the Ertoba farmers' association in Samtskhe-Javakheti, in collaboration with the GBDC technical team, has organized the Hay Olympiad. These events primarily aim to motivate farmers, foster the practical application of skills, and encourage knowledge sharing to produce high-quality hay.

In 2025, two editions took place—one early in the year and another towards the end—with participation growing each time. Ertoba member farmers strive to produce quality hay by following technical recommendations, an approach that directly impacts their income and the long-term viability of their farms. The final event of the year, organized at the initiative of the farmers themselves, was held in the village of Chobareti, in the Aspindza district.

Unlike previous editions, this gathering featured a strong emphasis on interactive games. During the event, farmers evaluated the hay quality themselves based on various criteria, allowing the top three batches—and their producers—to be identified. All participants received token gifts, while the winners earned additional prizes. Beyond the rewards, the winners become respected role models in the field, opening up new opportunities for their farms and inspiring others to excel. It was decided that future editions of the Olympiad would be held in the home village of the previous winning farmer.

These Olympiad offers farmers a unique opportunity to showcase the fruits of their labor, gain recognition for their efforts, and share their experiences with peers. This initiative encourages them to produce high-quality livestock fodder, thereby contributing to the development of robust, competitive, and prosperous farms.



"This is the second time in a row that my hay has won the olympiad. I welcome such events, which give farmers the opportunity to showcase their work and share their knowledge and practices. These activities strengthen the bonds between us and serve as a source of mutual motivation. High-quality hay not only boosts milk yields in livestock but also commands a higher price, thereby increasing my income. For the next edition, we decided to hold the Hay Olympiad in my village, Tskhruti. This will spark interest among more farmers and boost their motivation ».

Aram Atamiani, farmer and member of Ertoba

The Hay Olympiad represents...

Revitalization of the livestock farming sector and increased motivation among farmers

Recognition and sharing of experiences among peers

Dissemination of best practices, deepening of knowledge and introduction of modern methods

A sign of progress achieved through innovative approaches and joint efforts



SILAGE PRODUCERS



A successful collaboration among a group of silage producers

Since 2018, the 'Ertoba' association and its technical group have been actively working to improve silage production practices. Tamaz Shavadze, a farmer from the village of Rustavi (Aspindza district) was one of the first to decide to produce silage. Thanks to his determination and the technical team's support in enhancing knowledge and methods, he is now an independent silage producer and leads a group of seven people engaged in this activity.

The group's goal is to establish a high-quality feed supply and strengthen the livestock sector. This initiative not only enables the pooling of experiences and resources but also lays the groundwork for sustainable development. To this end, the technician supports the group throughout the entire production process, from seed selection to harvesting and storage techniques.



"After learning how much adding silage to rations boosted livestock productivity, we began producing it with the help of a technician. Observing that several farmers had deepened their knowledge of and interest in silage production, we formed a group comprising seven farms and, thanks to co-financing from Ertoba, purchased a single-row forage harvester. Experience showed us that this equipment did not allow us to produce large quantities or harvest within the required timeframes, so we acquired a higher-performance machine."

Recently, the group also acquired a silage unit and, even more recently, a manure spreader trailer to serve as supplementary equipment for silage production. The Ertoba association helped cofinance these investments.

I would like to highlight the efficiency and success of the cooperation within the group: none of us needs to rent equipment or hire outside labor. We handle the work for one another through mutual assistance. This year, our group jointly produced over 700 tons of silage; we sell about half of it to other farmers, providing us with a source of income.

However, this initiative has also enabled us, as farmers, to become more self-reliant: despite the small size of our land, we manage to produce enough feed for our livestock. None of this would have been possible without the involvement of Ertoba-GBDC-Fert. It was not just financial support, but a ray of hope born of collective action driven by the right approach."

Tamaz Shavadze, farmer from the village of Rustavi
Member and president of the Ertoba association

Analysis of calf mortality causes at Ertoba farms.



Since 2025, the Ertoba association has been monitoring calf mortality across its member farms—an initiative that is significant in several respects.

On the one hand, it enables the technical team to precisely identify the key factors driving calf mortality during the first few months of life; on the other, it provides an overview of the situation in the region, highlighting necessary changes to farming practices and identifying ways to eliminate the causes of this mortality.

At this stage, the study is not yet complete; it is conducted every six months. By the end of 2026, it will enable us to gain a comprehensive overview and identify ways to limit the problem.



A challenging veterinary situation in 2025

The year 2025 posed a major challenge for cattle farmers. Seasonal viral diseases spread widely across the three municipalities of Samtskhe-Javakheti, manifesting as foot rot, acute oral stomatitis, and skin lesions on the legs.

At the request of the Farmers' Association, the technical group responded immediately by holding informational training sessions on preventive and curative measures in both mountain pastures and villages.

An effective treatment was identified and offered to association members; it significantly improved the condition of the livestock and ensured the animals' successful recovery.

“Foot-and-mouth disease is a highly contagious viral disease affecting cattle, pigs, sheep and goats. Its main symptoms include fever, excessive salivation, and blisters on the mouth, tongue, hooves, udder, and feet. This disease causes significant economic losses for the livestock production. If you observe any suspicious symptoms, consult a veterinarian immediately. Early detection and rapid intervention are essential to halt the spread of the disease and protect your farm ».

Dr Shota Kuljanishvili, veterinarian.

Veterinary package

As of 2025, an updated veterinary service package has been introduced for Ertoba members; tailored to the needs of livestock farmers, it includes—in addition to state-funded vaccinations—the treatment and prevention of other seasonal diseases on an individual (per-animal) basis.

The payment system has also been revised: service costs are calculated per animal for each procedure, making it easier for farmers to choose how many animals to treat, taking seasonal factors into account. By 2025, 20 farms and 278 animals had benefited from this service.



Study on farmers' practices regarding cattle reproduction and selection

Improving the herd's genetics is a key priority for livestock farmers seeking to boost their herd's productivity and their farm's profitability. Various practices are employed in the region, including crossbreeding, artificial insemination, and natural mating. A study examining the practices of farmers belonging to the Ertoba organization began in 2025 and is currently being finalized.

Based on interviews with around twenty farmers, the study analyzes their perceptions and selection practices, as well as the resulting effectiveness.

Using the study's findings, the technical group will share information with farmers on modern genetic evaluation methods, enabling them to make more informed and profitable decisions when selecting breeding stock or undertaking genetic improvement initiatives.



Farmers are experimenting with producing potato plants from plantlets



Production of potato plants from plantlets

In 2025, at the initiative of potato growers and with the support of the GBDC technical group, five farms produced potato plants from young plantlets.

This trial aims to enable local farmers to produce high-grade (or "elite") seed potatoes themselves for highly sought-after varieties, such as Agria and Picasso. The experiment spans two years. At the end of the first year, the plant-yield was considered average, with a production volume covering an area equivalent to 500 m² from 0.5 hectares of cultivated land.

To implement this trial, Ertoba received support from Rural Advisory Services (RAS), which supplied the young plantlets to the farmers. As part of this initiative, several training and advisory sessions were organized, including a visit to the experimental plots for interested farmers to help them better understand the cultivation practices and the results achieved.

"Producing potato plants from seedlings was an interesting first experience for me. I've been growing potatoes for years, and lately, the quality of imported plants from other countries hasn't been very satisfactory. Now, I believe the plants we produce are more reliable: we know their grade and we know they are environmentally sound."

Producing potato plants can be promising for the region; it's a profitable activity in itself for farmers. It increases reliability and allows us to know exactly which grade of plants are available. Thank to Ertoba-GBDC and RAS for their support of this experiment."

Jambul Bolkvadze
a farmer and member of Ertoba from
the village of Ghordze



Supporting the development of beekeeping



In 2025, an apiary technician joined the GBDC technical team. In the autumn, he conducted field visits to the apiaries of the association's member beekeepers; following inspections, he provided recommendations on overwintering and feeding, prevention and treatment methods for Varroa mites and the emerging Tropilaelaps mite, as well as advice on diagnosing and treating various diseases.

Additionally, the technician prepared anti-varroa strips made from oxalic acid and glycerin for members of the Ertoba association. These strips represent an innovation for our region; they were previously tested in experiments conducted by the American scientist and beekeeper Randy Oliver. The specific fabric used to manufacture them was imported from the United States, as Oliver's experiments had demonstrated the high efficacy of strips made with that particular material. The use of oxalic acid is one of the most effective ways to combat Varroa mites; it is a biological agent against which the mite cannot develop resistance.

As for Tropilaelaps, it has already appeared in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, so the technician provided member beekeepers with appropriate recommendations regarding this pest.





Trilateral cooperation

The Ertoba farmers' association is currently highly active in the region, operating in the fields of livestock farming, potato cultivation, and beekeeping. It serves as a robustly structured agricultural governance body while establishing itself as a key hub for its members—and beyond.

Such a regional farmers' association opens up vast possibilities:

- ◆ The power of joint negotiations;
- ◆ The creation and effective use of joint resources;
- ◆ The sharing of knowledge and experience;
- ◆ The protection of regional products and improvement of their quality;
- ◆ The joint sales and marketing of products;
- ◆ The improvement of access to finance;
- ◆ The development of agricultural value chains;
- ◆ The advocacy of farmers' interests at the state or local levels, etc.

The existence of such an association in the region will have a positive impact on the development of the local economy, as well as on social and environmental factors. Three parties are involved in implementing this program: the Ertoba farmers' association, the French agri-agency Fert, and the GBDC Caucasus Office in Akhaltsikhe.

Ertoba is the key player in this partnership, as farmers are best positioned to understand their own needs and, consequently, to define priority objectives and implementation methods; the partner organizations assist the association in carrying out its tasks and achieving its goals by mobilizing various technical and financial resources.

- ◆ Creation and implementation of various services for the association's member farmers;
- ◆ Strengthening the local financial viability of farms;
- ◆ Training and inclusion of young people and increasing their interest in agricultural careers;
- ◆ Protection and promotion of local products;
- ◆ Qualitative and quantitative development of agricultural production;
- ◆ Establishment of a marketing network to supply the market.



Zurab Kuljanishvili
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Partner organizations



Ertoba - Samtskhe-Javakheti Farmers' Association

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