

Annex II – Farmers’ testimonies

For interviews with farmers and workers, the research team used the household income strategies approach, covering questions about incomes from wages, transfers, rents, profits, and subsistence activities, and indebtedness.¹

Farmers responded to detailed questions about production and harvest costs, household expenditures, and seasonal migrant workers. Finally, the research team asked questions about their perceptions of problems in hazelnut production and seasonal work.

Land size and productivity:

I think the greatest problem in the Black Sea region is property relations. For instance, land with title deeds is very little. Usually hazelnut gardens have been set up on forest land or public land. In my village, at least 70 % of the land has insecure legal tenure. There are families who have no title deeds. And lands with titles have become too complicated as a result of inheritance.

Hazelnut garden owner and village *muhtar*, Ünye, Ordu, 57 years old

Farmers use various strategies to maintain the size of or enlarge their farms. One strategy is for (usually) older sons to cultivate all their siblings' (especially sisters', inherited or expected to be inherited) land even if they do not hold the title deed.

Now suppose you (referring to a sister) are married in Kütahya (province). I live here with my dad, who is now 80 and I have been taking care of him. And let us suppose I have three or four other siblings. I have been cultivating this land for a long time but I don't have the title deed (which is in my father's name). Then neither you (the sister in Kütahya) nor my sister in Ağrı (province) recognizes this situation as legitimate and go to the state for the land to be subdivided. Then the state divides the land into as many pieces as the number of siblings you have.

Hazelnut garden owner, 8 hectares, Esmahanım village, Akçakoca, 40 years old.

Another strategy is to cultivate public lands (former public forest lands which have come under the 2/B status that allows cultivation) adjacent to land they formally own.

Yet another strategy is for farmers to rent additional gardens. Interviews showed that households engaged in hazelnut production might combine one or more of these strategies.

I have 2.2 hectares of land, half of which is 2/B. That is, former forests. We expect that the state will give us a title for it.

Hazelnut garden owner, Ünye, Ordu, 60 years old.

I have 5 hectares of registered land. And 5 hectares of unregistered land. Adding the forests, I have a total of 13 hectares.

Hazelnut garden owner, 2.2 hectares, Ünye, Ordu, 60 years old.

The eastern Black Sea coast experienced rural to urban emigration since the 1950s, due to its rough terrain, which made it very difficult to grow food crops beyond the subsistence level. Interviews with hazelnut garden owners pointed to the shortage of unpaid family labor:

¹ Smith and Wallerstein, 1984; Eroğlu, 2011; Sert, Yüksek and Alnıaçık, 2015.

Back in the old days, it used to be easy. You could find local workers in your village. There was even communal labor (imece). But now, everyone has migrated to İstanbul, Ankara or İzmir. There are no longer people who will work on the farm. Everyone comes during the harvest season and finds seasonal workers. ... For the past ten years, workers predominantly come from the Southeast.

Hazelnut garden owner, 4 hectares, Ünye, Ordu, 38 years old.

The youth only know how to eat hazelnuts. I have two sons. They were supposed to go to the farm this morning. They are still asleep... I am aging. They will inherit these farms. Either they will harvest it, or they won't. It is up to them. When I was 13 or 14, I would not leave the farm for the entire day. That's what we learned. Now the youngsters sit by the sea all day and steal hazelnuts from their dads...

Hazelnut garden owner, 5.7 hectares, Akçakoca district, 50 years old

There are 80 households in this village. Many consist of retirees aged over 50 or 60. ... A man has a hazelnut garden. He has to work on it. But what will he do? He cannot do it himself. He therefore turns to workers. When he employs workers, the cost goes up to 7.5 TL. ... You also have to consider the people here, who have to make a living only by growing hazelnuts.

(Question from interviewer: Do you grow food crops such as corn?) We don't do that either. Animal husbandry has also come to an end... I had five cows. But who will milk them? No daughter, no bride. My mother-in-law says her knees hurt. So that also came to an end.

Hazelnut garden owner, 1.4 hectares, Yenice village, Akçakoca, 60 years old

We are five people in the family. ... When the kids are in school, you have to employ workers to get the work done. Only during the harvest, my children supervise the workers. All of this depends on money. Trimming, cleaning the field, all of this... When the costs rise, we're left with nothing in our hands

Hazelnut garden owner, 6.5 hectares, Balatlı village, Akçakoca, 54 years old

Older farmers or farmers who have full-time wage jobs also employ skilled local laborers for trimming, hoeing, weeding, and spreading fertilizer and pesticide, at a cost three to five times higher the daily wage for harvest labor, thus increasing production costs. As cost rise, some farmers skip some farming tasks, with implications for productivity:

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I work in the private sector; therefore I cannot work in my own farm. I pay money for all the work. I pay wages.

Hazelnut garden owner, 7.5 hectares, Esmahanım village, Akçakoca, 50 years old

Six years ago we started using herbicides. This eroded the chemistry of the soil, drying all the living organisms.... A layer of dust appeared on the top soil, the most valuable layer. In the past, agricultural engineers would instruct us not to use herbicides, and instead to cut the weeds twice a year using a scythe. Because no fertilizer is as rich as decomposed weeds. But gasoline became too expensive. And the daily wage for weeding is 300 TL, including the rent of the mechanical scythe. 1 liter of gasoline is 5.5 TL. However much we don't want to use herbicides, we cannot do without using them.

(.....)

My fields have not seen a blade in ten years. (Question from interviewer: You don't hoe your field?) No. (Question for interviewer: Doesn't that affect your productivity?) It does. But I cannot cover the cost. Am I supposed to enrich the gas station?

Hazelnut garden owner, 6.5 hectares, Balath village, Akçakoca, 54 years old.

I harvest four tons of hazelnuts, and they (my cousins) harvest 1.5 ton of hazelnuts from the same size garden (next to mine). Why? Because I spread fertilizers, spray pesticides. I pay for the care of my garden. But my cousins only come for the harvest

Hazelnut garden owner, 7.5 hectares, Esmahanım village, Akçakoca, 50 years old.

Farmers complain that state institutions do not provide them with technical support for raising productivity:

We have so many agricultural engineers in the district governorate. But they never come and inspect what crops grow in a village, how pesticides should be sprayed... Therefore, we first want agricultural engineers to come to this village and socialize with the citizens

Hazelnut garden owner, 1.4 hectares, Yenice village, Akçakoca, 60 years old.

The increase in the number of years of compulsory education—first to eight years and then to 12 years—have resulted in significant changes. Often village schools are shut down, and students sent to nearby towns or larger villages. The following statements speak to the effects of these changes on hazelnut farmers:

Since compulsory education was extended to eight years, all villages were emptied. In the past, we would hear the National Anthem on Fridays, and see the Turkish flag raised to the school's mast...The school was closed in our village. People left the village in order to send their kids to middle school. Instead of bussing the kids to school in Akçakoca, the authorities could have sent more teachers here. Now you come to the village and there are no children, no national anthem, no flag, no schools, nothing. It is as if we live in a different country.

Hazelnut garden owner, 1.4 hectares, Yenice village, Akçakoca, 60 years old.

About the potential gains from mechanization:

A 40-year-old husband and wife owned a small garden and were sharecroppers for two other farms in the Döngelli village. They farmed a total of four hectares of hazelnuts in 2017. Together they performed all farming activities in line with the recommendations of the district agricultural directorate: weeding and hoeing the fields, trimming the trees, and spraying pesticides and spreading fertilizers. The husband also worked for wages in neighboring farms doing the same work. They had bought a tractor, a mechanical scythe, threshing machine, mechanical saw and other implements, and were still paying for some of them in installments. In spite of having to pay half of the yield to the hazelnut garden owner as rent, their income from hazelnut farming was sufficient for their family of three, including a daughter in middle school. This couple also hoped to buy a hazelnut-harvesting machine in the near future:

If someone with 5 hectares of land spent the money he pays to harvest workers on a harvesting machine, he would pay off the machine in a year. For instance, I spent 14,000 TL on harvest labor last year. Had I bought a harvest machine for 22,000 TL instead, I could have covered half of its cost (instead of paying the harvest workers). And, if I did some wage work for neighbors, I would have paid off the price of the harvesting machine by now.

Hazelnut sharecropper, Döngelli, Akçakoca, 40 years old.

The research team interviewed a retired teacher in Akçakoca, considered in the area as an exemplary farmer. This man claimed to have achieved an average yield of two to three tons per hectare in the previous years.² After retirement, he had acquired 6 hectares of hazelnut gardens and sharecropped another 6 hectares. The farmer said that he and his son used mechanized equipment for all tasks—from trimming the trees to weeding and hoeing the land to spraying pesticides and fertilizers, which reduced the time spent and was less physically taxing. They also saved on labor costs.

I have a tractor that is the most suitable for hazelnut growers. I have 11 different appliances that can be used with the tractor. I use them to harvest hazelnuts. I want to set an example for Akçakoca. You pay too much in wages when you hand pick. Thirty person-days are needed to harvest one ton of hazelnuts. That amounts to 1800 TL this year. It is too much. When you use a mechanized system, you can lower this cost to 600 TL. I also help neighbors in return for a fee. I have a threshing machine, a harvesting machine, and a spraying machine. When my work is done, I do my neighbors' work. My machines are never idle. ... I am always in the field unless it rains.

(...)

Ten years ago I would get a yield of 10 to 12 tons from 10 hectares. Now I get 30 tons
Hazelnut garden owner, 6 hectares + 6 hectares sharecropping, Göktepe village, Akçakoca, above 50 years old.

Costs of production:

During the fieldwork, farmers consistently complained about high costs of fuel, labor and other inputs:

² According to official statistics, average productivity in Düzce was 680 kilograms for hectare in 2016 (TMO, 2017).

The cost of producing one kilogram of hazelnut is around 8 TL, I think. Costs are high. For example, one sack of fertilizers costs 80 TL. And eventually what I earn is a little more than 8 TL per kilo.

Hazelnut garden owner, 2 hectares, Esmahanım, Akçakoca, 51 years old.

You send one person to the field for scything and he charges 300 TL per day. Can a farmer pay 300 TL per day for one worker? I mean he only scythes weed... Then what will the farmer earn? Then there is raking, for which you hire another person for 90 TL per day. The mechanical scythe requires gasoline, which is 5 TL per liter. Then this machine incurs its own expenses...

Hazelnut garden owner, 1.4 hectares, Yenice, Akçakoca, 60 years old.

Sister, before you touch a kg of hazelnuts, it costs 7 to 7.5 TL. Trimming, raking, weeding, fertilizing, etc. Now there is also a pesticide against a fungus. This year, I had to spray that product four times... Sister, if the authorities will hear of what you are asking us, please make a note of this. A kg of hazelnuts costs 7 to 7.5 TL

Hazelnut garden owner who joins the conversation during the previous interview.

Market uncertainty and indebtedness:

The domestic and international markets for hazelnuts are full of uncertainties for farmers. Absent any effective farmers' organization or regulation of the hazelnut supply by the state, or by some independent agency, hazelnut cultivation is full of financial risks. These uncertainties not only discourage farmers from making productivity-increasing investments but also put their incomes at risk, leading them into a spiral of indebtedness.

Indebtedness became an issue in 2014 and 2015, when the price of hazelnuts peaked mid-season due to low production in the eastern Black Sea region and high international demand. Some farmers took out bank loans or loans from the Agricultural Credit Cooperatives to buy tractors and other tools. But the next year, the price was much lower, making it difficult for many farmers to make repayments.

When the price rose above 20 TL, we thought the price would not fall down to 9 TL the next year. We said it would not fall below 14 TL. So we made investments based on the assumption of 14 TL in the next harvest.

Hazelnut garden owner who joined the conversation during an interview.

Do not think that these villagers are people who don't know how to calculate. They know their accounts. The problem is this: price volatility creates uncertainty around making financial decisions.

Hazelnut garden owner, 7.5 hectares, Esmahanım village, Akçakoca, 50 years old.

The state has a negative approach towards growers. The citizens are entirely left to fend by themselves in fierce market conditions. They have no protector. (Question from interviewer: What is your expectation from the state then?) First of all, the public sector should have a sound policy towards agricultural producers. It doesn't have a policy. Farmers have been completely left to the mercy of businesses. I mean, whatever the international monopolies dictate that is what is done.

Hazelnut garden owner, 4 hectares, Ünye, Ordu, 38 years old.

This is how the cycle of debt works: Throughout the year, a farmer without sufficient means borrows money from the local wholesaler/intermediary (*manav*), with the promise of repayment after the harvest. The final step in getting such an informal loan would be to pay the harvest workers. Once the farmer sells his produce to the *manav*, the farmer and the *manav* would settle their accounts.

People left their hazelnuts for safekeeping (emanet) last year when the price was 13 TL. And we did the same with the expectation of a price rise, but the price fell to 7-8 TL. You know, our hazelnut (deli sava variety) is of high quality, with a thin shell and with a randıman of 53 %. This whole region grows deli sava. So we consigned it for 9.25 TL and had to sell it eventually for around 10 TL. This means we didn't make much profit out of it.

Hazelnut garden owner, 2 hectares, Esmahanım, Akçakoca, 51 years old.

Many producers complain about the safekeeping practice of *manavs*, arguing that it has the effect of artificially pushing prices down throughout the year, and mentioned the need for unity among farmers.

A safe keeper (emanetçi) rents a warehouse. If I had 40-50 dönüms of land, I would build my own warehouse. Working with a merchant (manav) is risky. Sometimes he sells your hazelnut and doesn't let you know. He only pays you when you go to him. I don't know what he does with my hazelnuts. (Question from the interviewer: Could he have sold the hazelnuts you left him for safekeeping last year at a higher price than now?) Maybe he did. Maybe he is still keeping it. I don't know. He doesn't let me know.

Hazelnut garden owner, 1.2 hectares, Akçakoca, 66 years old.

Actually, it would be best for the producers to establish cooperatives. In this village, we have a warehouse that dates back from Fiskobirlik years. It would be great for us to utilize the place for storage. Unfortunately, we cannot come together and act in unity. Since producers are up to their neck in debt, they cannot move their heads to see the alternatives. So, they feel compelled to leave their hazelnut for consignment (emanet). If producers could store their own hazelnut then they would be in control. But now, it is the buyers who are in control.

Hazelnut garden owner, 2 hectares, Esmahanım, Akçakoca, 51 years old.

Farmers' income and income strategies:

One strategy adopted by smallholding farmers to increase their income is to expand production into public land or engage in sharecropping. Another strategy is to exert extra effort (by using family labor) on economically inefficient fields.

I have 1.2 hectares and spend seven days to hoe the field myself. No one else would do it because my field is steep and full of rocks. ... But I have to do it. I am putting my daughter through university."

Hazelnut garden owner, 1.2 hectares, Balathı village, Akçakoca, 50 years old.

I don't let my children work on the farm. I wish my father had let me take a public sector job, when the opportunity arose a long time ago. But he didn't. Back then, there weren't so many seasonal migrant workers. He objected, saying, "Son, who will take care of all this hazelnut?" But now, I can find workers to harvest the hazelnut. Let my children leave (this place) and save themselves.

Hazelnut garden owner, 1.4 hectares, Esmahanım village, Akçakoca, 58 years old.

I send 2,000 TL a month to my twin sons who are enrolled in university. One is in Antalya, the other in Alanya. That's why we try so hard (to grow hazelnuts).

Hazelnut garden owner, 8 hectares, Esmahanım village, Akçakoca, 40 years old.

Do I make a lot of money? No, I don't. We harvest the garden because of my late father's will. If hazelnut production were enough for a living, why would I go and work in a wage job (after having retired already)?

Hazelnut garden owner, 7.5 hectares, Esmahanım village, Akçakoca, 50 years old.

Producers are living in dire conditions. They cannot do cattle farming or cultivate other products. My family had fifteen farm animals back in the day. Now, you couldn't find fifteen farm animals in all of Esmahanım. In terms of farming, hazelnut is what is left, but hazelnut farming itself has ceased to be a source of income for many producers since they already sell their product before the harvest because of their debts.

Hazelnut garden owner, 2 hectares, Esmahanım, Akçakoca, 51 years old.