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FAS Sofia Promotes U.S. Agricultural Products at a Big Culinary Fest

Report Categories:

CSSF Activity Report

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Report Highlights:

From May 12-28 FAS/Sofia participated in the first of a kind for Bulgaria traveling culinary festival “Bulgaria Meets the Flavors of the World”. The roadshow took place in seven of the biggest cities in the country. FAS/Sofia, with the support of local importers, successfully promoted big variety of U.S. agricultural products available on the Bulgarian market and used the opportunity to educate industry representatives and end consumers about the high quality and diversity of U.S. food and beverages. According to statistics provided by the organizers, the campaign was broadly covered by more than **120** specialized, mainstream, and online media. More than **100,000 people** visited the event (over 95% of them visited the U.S. stall). The campaign reached more than **4.07 million** Facebook users and the web site of the campaign was visited more than **2.6 million** times during the event from March 1st to May 30th. (*Remark: The population of Bulgaria is 7.2 million*). So far there has not been another opportunity for FAS/Sofia to reach such a large audience of current and potential consumers.

General Information:

To promote culinary traditions of various countries to show their diversity and stimulate trade, culinary, and cultural partnership.

The purpose of FAS’ participation was to increase the importers, distributors, packers, retail, and HRI sector awareness of the high quality U.S. agricultural products currently available on the Bulgarian market, and to signify the bilateral trade and investment opportunities existing in the food and agricultural sector.

2. Market Constraints and Opportunities:

| Opportunities |
|---|
| Increase of consumption of food and beverages is creating demand for more imports. |
| Migration of people from rural to urban areas continues at a rapid pace. |
| Bulgarian value good quality food, innovative, healthy and reasonably priced products. |
| Growing food processing industry is looking for new imported food ingredients. |
| Efficient domestic distribution network. |
| Bulgarian market is accessible by sea. |
| Marketing costs to increase consumer awareness are considerably low. |
| Constraints |
| Bulgarian membership in the European Union puts U.S. exporters in a less favorable position than EU member states because of duties. |
| Reduced consumer budget due to price-conscious consumers. |
| Bulgarian domestic producers are receiving European funding to upgrade production efficiency and product quality. |
| Bulgarian farmers increase agricultural production, reducing demand for imports in the country. |
| Fluctuations in the exchange rate and current appreciation of the U.S. dollar against Euro puts U.S. exporters at a disadvantage compared with exporters of the EU. Bulgarian Lev (BGN) has a fixed exchange rate against the Euro (EURO 1 = BGN 1.95583) |

3. Expected Results and Desired Outcomes:

Due to the anticipated high visitors’ attendance rate, it was expected that the awareness about U.S. agricultural products and culinary traditions will be strongly increased among end consumers as well as among current and potential importers, who were invited by FAS/Sofia, and others who attended individually. The media and social media releases were expected to enhance broadly the informational campaign. FAS/Sofia recruited importers to provide products to be displayed and sampled such as U.S. whiskey, wine, tree nuts, dry fruits, popcorn, snack foods, beer, and pulses.

Although end consumers are usually not an attainable target at FAS/Sofia’s promotions, the event promised to provide an excellent opportunity to reach this audience as well as to target current and potential importers, culinary experts and bloggers, and media representatives. FAS/Sofia also aimed to further strengthen relations with the importers by demonstrating efforts and ability to help promote their products.

4. Actual results and Outcomes:

On May 12-28 FAS/Sofia participated in the first of a kind for Bulgaria culinary festival “Bulgaria Meets the Flavors of the World”. The event was organized by the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism [GTC Bulgaria](#), [HRC Culinary Academy](#), and International Women’s Club in Bulgaria in partnership with 18 Embassies, 7 Municipalities, 7 leading shopping centers, leading companies such as Coca-Cola, Bulgaria Air, Wizz Air, Zagorka, Bilateral Chambers of Commerce, and over 150 private companies and importers. The campaign was officially launched on March 1st with a press conference lead by the Deputy Minister of Tourism and attended by Ambassadors, trade partners, and national media. The roadshow was held in the shopping malls of seven of Bulgaria’s biggest cities as follows: opened on May 12 in Stara Zagora and continued on May 14 in Burgas, May 16 in Plovdiv, May 18 in Veliko Tarnovo, May 20 in Ruse, May 22 in Varna, and the closing event was held in Sofia on May 28. FAS/Sofia’s Marketing Specialist Alex Todorov represented FAS at the U.S. stall in five cities and directly interacted with industry, trade, HRI, and retail representatives as well as culinary professionals and media. He coordinated with importers, interested to have their U.S. products displayed and promoted, as well as provided information and promotional materials to the visitors. Mr. Todorov was the main contact for the organizers regarding logistics and performance, met with current and potential importers in each city, established relations with media representatives, bloggers, Culinary Academy officials, and government representatives, and explored future promotional opportunities with them.



The USA stall

The organizers built a Gourmet Alley in the food court zone in the main shopping malls where each country had a designated booth/stall with a recognizable image. FAS/Sofia, with the support of the importers, promoted various U.S. agricultural products available in Bulgaria such as whiskey, wine, nuts, dry fruits, popcorn, beer, beans, and lentils. The FAS Marketing Specialist provided the visitors with information about U.S. agriculture and products, as well as giving away lots of handout promotional materials such as brochures, leaflets, etc. At the end of the alley there was a cooking installation where professional chefs conducted culinary shows three times a day and presented meals typical for each country. All participants were given the liberty to decorate their stall per their personal vision of how to achieve best promotional effect.



Promotional Banners in the Shopping Malls

The Mayors of each town supported the event and most of them participated in the openings. Many Ambassadors and other members of the diplomatic community attended as well. The closing event in Sofia was opened by the Minister of Tourism and many diplomats. This helped to provide additional publicity to the event.



The Mayor of Plovdiv Ivan Totev at the opening (left) and in conversation with an Ambassador, FAS/Sofia booth immediately behind (right)

Exceptional outreach:

According to statistics provided by the organizers, the event’s outreach exceeded everyone’s expectations as it was broadly covered by more than **120** specialized, mainstream, and online media (a list of media and links to online publications is available in attachment 1). More than **100,000 people** visited the event (over 95% of them visited the U.S. booth). The campaign reached more than **4.07 million** Facebook users and the web site of the campaign was visited more than **2.6 million** times during the campaign from March 1st to May 30th. (*Remark: total population of Bulgaria is 7.2 million people*). So far there has not been another opportunity for FAS/Sofia to reach such a large audience of end consumers, industry professionals, media, and government representatives and to perform such a large-scale promotion of U.S. agricultural products and culinary traditions.



Official opening in Stara Zagora and Ruse

FAS/Sofia managed to recruit [Coca-Cola HBC Bulgaria](#) to participate in the event. Their representatives were located right next to the USA booth. This was a strong attention-drawing factor for the visitors as free Coca-Cola samples were given away, which together with the perfect location of the USA booth, directed visitors' flow straight to the booth. After getting a free Coca-Cola sample all visitors stopped by the USA booth and talked with the FAS Marketing Specialist about the displayed products as well as received promotional brochures about the products and information on where they can buy them.



The U.S. stall in Varna

Each country's culinary traditions were presented by a respected Chef from the HRC Culinary Academy at no cost for FAS. The used products were also paid by the organizers. USA's culinary was represented by distinguished [Chef Henri Donneaux](#), who is a Head Instructor at HRC Culinary Academy with over 24 years of professional experience in Belgium, France, and the U.S., and who has worked with world renowned 3 Michelin star Chefs.



Chef Henri Donneaux preparing an American meal

The organizers took full responsibility for the installation and transportation of the USA booth so FAS did not incur any cost for that.

Usually a single event in Bulgaria would cost about \$3,000-\$5,000, depending on venue and number of invitees, and it would directly reach an audience of up to 200 people. With this event FAS/Sofia managed to directly approach an audience of close to 100,000 current and potential consumers and indirectly reached millions of potential consumers through media and social media at the cost of about \$1,100 for FAS. If FAS/Sofia was to fully cover the financial aspect of this event, it would've cost at least \$10,000 and would have been more difficult to perform logistically. In addition to organizing an event at a reduced cost and saving about \$9,000 to FAS, for the past seven years FAS/Sofia have not had an opportunity to organize a promotional activity outside of Sofia and make an outreach to potential consumers in the countryside, which was successfully achieved by this event.

The Embassy's Public Affairs Office supported the activity by announcing the event and posting pictures from the main locations on the Embassy Facebook page. The Facebook posts received hundreds of likes and shares.



Embassy Facebook page posts

The event also included a noble charity element. Almost U.S. \$10,000 were collected by the organizers and donated to hospitals, children in need, and their families.

FAS/Sofia received a Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of the U.S. Ambassador in Bulgaria. The certificate was received by FAS/Sofia's Marketing Specialist from the Deputy Minister of Tourism in an official ceremony.



FAS Sofia's Marketing Specialist (left) receives Certificate of Appreciation from the Deputy Minister of Tourism (right)

The effectiveness of the promotion will be measured by the number on trade leads generated and actual sales registered 90 and 180 days after the event. Post will conduct interviews with the importers to assess the quality and to obtain useful feedback for improvement of the promotional effort.



Left: Minister of Tourism opening the last event in Sofia; Right: Embassy's Commercial Attaché Maria Galindo giving opening remarks and FAS Marketing Specialist (on the left)



Left: FAS Marketing Specialist and Jim Beam Brand Manager; Right: U.S. stall and sampling stations at Bulgaria mall in Sofia

Importers and Promoted Brands:

FAS/Sofia successfully promoted more than 30 brands and sub-brands, represented by 15 importers in Bulgaria. See the list of importers and brands below.

| Importer | Product | Brand |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Maxxium Bulgaria | Whiskey | Jim Beam, Maker's Mark |
| Brown-Forman Bulgaria | Whiskey | Jack Daniel's |
| Pernod-Ricard Bulgaria | Whiskey | Four Roses |
| Selected Brands | Whiskey | Wild Turkey |
| Bibendum | Wine | Stag's Leap, Chateau Ste. Michelle, Columbia Crest, Northstar, Col Solare |
| Domaine Boyar International | Wine | Geysler Peak |
| Global Vini | Wine | Sunset Creek; Rocky Creek |
| Kronos JSC | Nuts | Kronos Snack |
| Victoria Nuts | Nuts | Rois nuts |
| Detelina's Nuts | Nuts and dried fruits | Detelina's Nuts, Detelina's Fitness, Detelina's Raw Nuts |
| Korona-M | Nuts and dried fruits | Korona |
| Rival Invest | Popcorn | Golden American Dream, New York Nights, The Best Choice |
| SuiCo | Pulses | Krina |
| Global Food Company | Pulses | IZZI |
| Gala Drinks Ltd | Beer | Budweiser, Coors Light |

5. Recommendations/Follow-up evaluations:

FAS/Sofia continues to maintain good contact with all of the importers and puts forward strong efforts

to make them feel supported. The good relationship with the importers gives the opportunity to the FAS office to obtain up-to-date information about the market trends and issues with the competitors and with the local regulations. Such events also provide opportunity to FAS/Sofia to establish new contacts with people from the industry.

The Embassy's Ambassador expressed great satisfaction about the outcome of the event. This opinion was strongly supported by the Embassy Public Affairs Section, based on their personal impressions as well as on the media publications.

Given the huge and positive outcome and feedback, FAS/Sofia would recommend participating in next year's edition of this activity in order to keep increasing the consumer's awareness about U.S. agricultural products, to help the importers deepen their access to the market, and to demonstrate to them that FAS/Sofia is a strong supporter and advocate of their interests regarding trade promotion and market access of U.S. agricultural products.

6. Cost:

Cost: \$ 1,105
Source: FY 2016 (CSSF In-Country Travel Category)

7. Post Contact Information:

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End of report