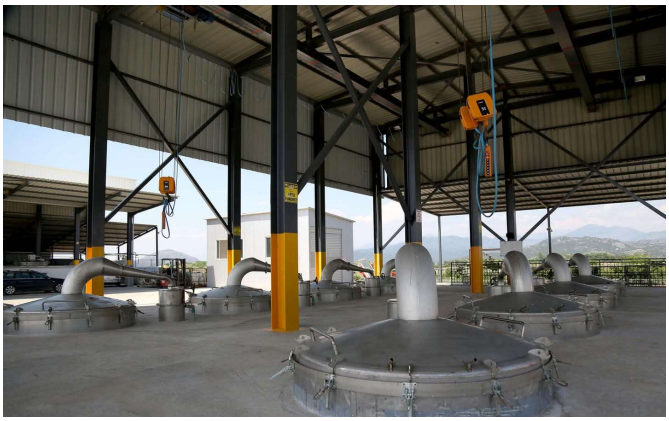
# THE DIASPORA-DRIVEN SUCCESS OF ALBANIA'S ESSENTIAL OILS INDUSTRY

EMILAND SKORA, STANDING IN FRONT OF HIS DISTILLERY IN MALËSIA E MADHE, ALBANIA

In celebration of National Diaspora Day and International Migrants Day on December 18, we shine a spotlight on Emiland Skora, an inspiring example of the Albanian diaspora's potential. After leaving Albania in 1999 to pursue his studies in the U.S., Emiland returned to his homeland 14 years later with a vision: to drive innovation in agriculture, introduce new technologies, and create high-value products that meet global demand.



MEDITERRANEAN EXPORT IMPORT ALBANIA DISTILLERY IN MALËSIA E MADHE, ALBANIA

Emiland's passion for agriculture was inspired by his family and Albania's rich biodiversity. Recognizing the potential of Albanian essential oils, he began promoting them to U.S. clients. His breakthrough came in 2011 when his first client placed an order, leading him to work with his father to set up a distillery in Albania. "Our first distillery was practically two pots. We didn't know anything about producing essential oils," he admits. "But with the help of a family friend, we took baby steps."

Dividing his time between the U.S. and Albania, Emiland founded Mediterranean Export Import Albania (MEIA), a company dedicated to producing top-quality essential oils.

The first few years were challenging, especially since the U.S. market demanded certified, high-quality products. To meet this demand, Emiland worked directly with farmers, providing training, ensuring certifications, and incorporating new technologies from abroad to ensure the highest standards. His efforts paid off, leading to significant growth.

EMILAND SKORA SPEAKING WITH FARMERS IN MALËSIA E MADHE, ALBANIA / PHOTO CREDIT: MEIA

By 2020, MEIA had become Albania's top essential oil exporter, offering oils from helichrysum, lavender, juniper berry, and more. The company experienced a massive 36-fold increase in sales since its inception in 2011, growing from €150,000 to €5.4 million in sales. What began with just two distillation pots has evolved into a thriving operation with modern distilleries in Malësia e Madhe and Tirana, with plans for a third facility in southern Albania to produce cold-pressed essential oils for export. "We pride ourselves on producing the highest quality oils. Quality is key, as client recommendations helped me expand from American clients to selling essential oils in EU markets, including Germany, Switzerland, and France." Emiland says.

FARMERS HARVESTING MEDICINAL AROMATIC PLANTS IN THE FIELDS OF MALËSIA E MADHE, ALBANIA / PHOTO CREDIT: MEIA

MEIA's success has transformed northern Albania's agricultural sector. Initially working with just 15 farmers, MEIA now partners with more than 450. "We are creating jobs and empowering women and young people," Emiland shares. The company is one of the few in Albania offering long-term contracts to farmers, helping to formalize the agricultural sector and stabilize the market. With 50 full-time staff and more than 700 seasonal workers, MEIA is bringing positive changes to underserved regions.

Emiland attributes much of his success to the lessons he learned in the U.S. "Living there taught me how to operate my business, the importance of innovation and technology, as well as to never give up. Those experiences shaped my approach to life and business." Reflecting on his journey, Emiland feels both pride and gratitude. "The challenges have been immense, but the rewards are greater," he says. "For me, returning to Albania wasn't just a decision—it was a calling. My message to all diaspora members is to go back to your roots and invest in your home country," he urges. "There are many ways to contribute, whether through investing financially, sharing knowledge, or promoting Albanian products."

USAID's Compete SëBashku aims to enhance the global competitiveness of Albanian agribusinesses like MEIA by helping them meet EU standards, access financing, and expand into new markets. The project will also focus on creating economic opportunities for women and youth, further strengthening Albania's agricultural sector as the country works toward accession to the European Union. Emiland's success story is a shining example of how diaspora-driven investments can fuel Albania's growth and global presence.

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