



## **26-year-old entrepreneur Ionel Burtea makes €6 million selling fresh fruit**

**Bucharest, September 16<sup>th</sup> – Ionel Burtea, 26, runs a €6 million business in agriculture from selling fruits. Burtea has also ongoing investment with European funds worth €2 million in agricultural machinery, storage spaces, the construction of greenhouses in protected areas and agrotourism. Next year, he plans to list his company – Abund Berry – on the stock exchange to attract the necessary capital to increase local production.**

### **The Story of Abund Berry**

Ionel Burtea was 21 when he decided to start a business in agriculture while studying at ASE.

With an initial budget of €20,000, he started to cultivate blackberries on 1 hectare of land and brought his family into the business – his grandfather, parents, and sister. The decision to launch the wild berries business was made following attentive research of the market, wherein issues regarding the availability of Romanian fruits in supermarkets were identified, as well as a lack of variety among wines with novel and unconventional flavors. In fact, the passion for wines was the foundation for launching his business in 2017.

Over time, the lot with blackberries grew, and the young farmer decided to cultivate raspberries and strawberries as well. Thus, today, Ionel Burtea and his family manage a total area of 20 hectares with blackberries, raspberries and strawberries in Țicleni, Gorj county. The production is sold under his own brand – Abund Berry.

“As a student, I decided to launch a business in agriculture because I had this dream, of doing something for and with my family, for the place where I grew up, of being able to offer Romanians locally produced wild berries. I also wanted to create jobs and attract young people to remain in the country, and not settle abroad. My family and I have a passion for wines, and this was the driving force and idea behind the business. I found out that blackberry or blueberry wine have a special taste and flavor, and that they can complement the existing offer of grape wines on the Romanian market quite well. We started to produce blackberry wine in 2017, and we launched the Berry Wine/ALAI brand that can be found in our partners’ networks,” explains Ionel Burtea, the founder of the Abund Berry business.



### **Abund Berry in Numbers**

- €6 million in turnover
- Investments of €2 million through European projects
- 20 hectares cultivated with blackberries, raspberries, strawberries, and blueberries
- 1,000 square meters warehouse in Buftea
- Five supermarket chains wherein Abund Berry fruits are distributed
- Over 30 Romanian farmers from whom fruits are bought
- Over 20 permanent employees and 20 seasonal workers

### **Business Partnerships**

Since the launch of the business, Ionel Burtea sought to distribute his fruits in as many supermarkets as possible, and to collaborate with companies in the HoReCa field. In order to secure the fresh fruit supply throughout the year, the young farmer decided to expand his business and the assortments offered to his partners in 2020. To that extent, he started purchasing blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, plums, peaches, nectarines, and strawberries from Romanian producers, and to import fruits from the Netherlands, Peru, Chile, Poland, Argentina, Spain, and Portugal.

“I am personally involved in the collaboration with Romanian farmers, I visit the farms and check the fruits, and their quality and appearance before I decide to purchase them and sell them to our partners. I travel more than 50,000 km annually, all over the country, to meet partner farmers or other farmers. Abund Berry is one of the main distributors of fresh fruit for Mega Image, Carrefour, Profi, and Metro. The standards that we must meet are extremely rigorous, and, because of that, we are careful when we select our suppliers, so that we ensure the best storage and transport conditions,” says Ionel Burtea.

### **Record in 2022**

This year, Abund Berry set a fruit sales record, by delivering over 1,000 tonnes of local and imported fruits to supermarkets, including over 100 tonnes of raspberries. Ionel Burtea explains why these are significant figures and what it means to sell 100 tonnes of raspberries.

“One hundred tonnes of raspberries translate into 800,000 boxes of 125g each that my team prepares for the sale; they check them, sort, label, and load them into boxes and then into trucks. It is a meticulous process, that requires attention and a certain rhythm, as there are approximately 40 people involved. On a daily basis, we deliver approximately 2,200 raspberry casseroles to our customers. Add to this figure the other fruits that are checked, packed, labeled, and delivered. Our effort is immense, to meet the demand,” declares Ionel Burtea.



### **The Challenges of the Pandemic. Focusing on Solutions**

The pandemic brought new challenges and changes for which Ionel Burtea had to find solutions and make decisions, to move forward.

Prior to the pandemic, the young farmer attended fairs and various industry events, to present his products and search for new business partners. Apart from the collaboration with Romanian markets, an important sales channel for the company were grocers, restaurants, and other HoReCa partners. Ionel Burtea had an ongoing project based on European funds – a greenhouse for strawberries, still under construction – as well as his own investment in tourism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted supply chains, numerous HoReCa businesses have been affected, and some of them have even closed. Burtea compensated for the turnover decrease on this channel by selling online, which increased significantly through the allocation of necessary resources – online shop, online advertising, newsletters, a dedicated team, specific logistics.

Another decision was to put the tourism project on hold and wait for the industry to settle. New requirements from the authorities were expected, also the customers' expectations were supposed to change, therefore the whole project might need to reposition. Also the services offered needed to be reviewed, and the resources to relaunch the project identified.

As for the projects based on European funds, they benefitted from the support of the national authorities (AFIR), but the farmer faced issues with the supply of machinery, processing equipment, and construction materials from suppliers in Italy and Spain.

### **Plans for the Future**

Ionel Burtea seeks to grow his business, and, to that extent, he decided to list his company on the stock exchange next year, in order to attract the necessary capital to support the expansion of the local production activities.

For the year 2023, the young farmer aims for a €10 million turnover, and wishes to submit a project to Horizon, a direct funding line from the European Commission.

In his opinion, a new trend is developing in the agricultural sector, in the shape of business to customer, directly from the producer to the consumer, with increasing demand for fresh fruits and vegetables. Although local products are preferred, they still do not have a large share on the supermarket shelves.

Ionel Burtea seeks to complete the strawberry greenhouse, a project accessed on Submeasure 4.1a – fruit growing, establishment of strawberry greenhouses, processing, and storage unit. The value of the project is €1.4 million – VAT included –, the targeted area is



4,560 square meters, and the technical area is 528 square meters. European funds cover 90% of the investment, while his own contribution is of 10%.

### **About Ionel Burtea**

Ionel Burtea graduated from the Faculty of International Economic Relations of the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest. The topic of his Bachelor's Thesis was his own business, which offered him the opportunity to learn how to develop a business plan; this proved useful when he wrote the projects for the European funds he applied for.

Ionel has been passionate about personal development and entrepreneurship books since adolescence. He launched his own business at the age of 21, and he is permanently preoccupied with its development and consolidation, through innovative agriculture customized solutions and modern management principles.

Ionel Burtea is interested in the community where he grew up, and the role of young people in influencing change in the local culture and in the Romanian society. To this extent, since 2019, he has been organizing TEDx conferences in Târgu Jiu, where he invites, as speakers, Romanians with stories of success, to inspire young people.

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