

<u>Maritsa Invest</u> is an agricultural credit cooperative, founded in 1996 by a group of small farmers. The cooperative was approved by the Ministry of agriculture and food as one of the beneficiaries under the PHARE program of the EU for the development of financial services in rural areas of Bulgaria, called "Scheme for Agricultural Capital Fund in 1997."

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During the period 1997 - 2000 under the Scheme the cooperative received additional capital grants from the Bulgarian government and the European Commission to support the expansion of its activities and to attract new members. During this period, Crédit Agricole Consultants from France provided technical assistance to the cooperative to meet the objectives of the Scheme.

The mission of Maritza Invest is to provide access to high-quality financial, non-financial, and savings services to small businesses in rural and semirural areas, and to work towards building a more equitable society where the people with small businesses living in rural areas will have better chances for a life of a dignity.

The Credit Cooperative provides a wide range of credit products, developed mainly for the needs of the people living in the rural areas.

Maritza Invest offers four types of loans in accordance with the needs of the clients. The Cooperative offers also to its members short terms saving as well as membership in an insurance fund, through which small farmers can pay their contributions to the Health insurance institute and the State pension fund.