

# **Palestinian Farmers Union**



## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**YEAR 1999**

**Hand in Hand for a Green Palestine**

## ***Introduction***

The agricultural sector is considered one of the most significant sectors in Palestine. Due to its contribution in the national economy which is estimated to be around 17% of the total local production. In addition to what this sector is privileged of having supportive elements such as the agricultural land (around 1834million dunums) it provides around 13% of labor, 91% of vegetables, 90% of read meet and 16% of milk.

Despite that the agricultural sector suffered and still suffering of many obstacles and pressures. Through occupying and confiscating the land, controlling the water resources, destroying the infrastructure, and controlling the marketing process of the agricultural produce and the prices of its requirements the Israeli occupation has tried to link the Palestinian agricultural sector with the Israeli economy. In spite of his limited capabilities and the forth-mentioned Israeli aggressions the Palestinian farmer resisted and defended his land and country.

The need for farmers to work collectively in defending their lands and fighting Israeli aggression was translated in setting up the Farmers' Union in 1993. There have been a number of casualties among farmers, some were murders and other tortured in Israeli prisons. The union emerged to help farmers defend their lawful and professional rights and in fulfilling their ultimate goal of establishing a Palestinian State with Jerusalem its capital. The role of the Union was enhanced with the Palestinian Authority in charge in that it participated in drafting laws and regulations regarding farmers.

The year 1999 was important in crystallizing the union's activities embodied in the internal re-structuring of the union. There has been more emphasis on the basic issues like that of farmers' productivity through the set up of farmers' associations and the promotion of collective work.

The union's plan was demonstrated through the eight programs implemented with the farmers. The programs aimed at improving services and enhancing the farmers' sense of belonging to the union and its importance in their lives. The most important program is the tax returns program, the medical insurance program and the farmers' associations. This unified the farmers' efforts in the union and strengthened its representative and institutional role among other institutions. The union has managed to pin point the urgent issues in the farmers' lives and has been successful in handling these issues. The union is currently working with other international unions to attract the support needed to enable the farmers to go back to the developmental planning as a basic factor for farmers to benefit from the proposed projects and the projects implemented by agricultural governmental and non-governmental organizations.

## **The Palestinian Farmers' Union's most important activities during 1999.**

1999 was an especially good year in crystallizing the union's activities and that was through eight core programs that offered efficient and direct services to the farmers.

There has been a significant stress on voluntary work and on the set up of farmers' gatherings according to the prevailing circumstances of each of the union's locations. The most important accomplishments are:

*Firstly: On the Financial and organizational levels:*

1. The union has succeeded in overcoming the financial deficit amounting to \$ 23000 and stabilizing the financial situation for 1999 with an overall budget of \$ 51,000.
2. The union has succeeded in unifying the West Bank and Gaza union boards and in activating the roles played by the boards and executive offices in the decision making process of the union's work. This led to organizing the financial and administrative situation compared to previous years.
3. There has been an increase in the number of members reaching 4163 members. There has also been an activation in the internal structure of the union through re-electing district councils in Tulkarem, Jenin, Jericho, Hebron and Nablus.
4. The formation of a union's cadre to include seven basic employees, two nominated and one part time employee in addition to 45 volunteer. The volunteers are to support the cadre to accomplish daily activities in the various districts. The voluntary work is estimated to reach \$ 121,000, that is more than 120% of paid work.
5. Developing the cadre's abilities through offering them eight training courses in the various districts.

*Secondly: On the level of developing and building the farmers' associations:*

1. The construction of 24 farmers' association and re-activation of 5 farmers' associations working in vegetable production, green houses, grapes, palm trees, bananas, bees and goats. These associations were distributed in Jericho, the Jordan Valley, Gaza, Jenin, Tulkarem, Nablus, Hebron, Ramallah, Tobas and Qalqilya where the total number of members reached 1392. The union is currently working on setting up specialized branches for the associations within the union body.
2. There has been a number of meetings between the representatives of each association in the districts to coordinate the work. There were 6 central meetings and 145 on site meetings held.
3. An establishing committee for the branch union of palm tree farmers in Gaza and in the Jordan Valley was set up. The union help the branch unions to get subsidies for palm seedlings amounting to \$ 39,000 and to construct a palm nursery for palm reproduction through tissue culture.
4. The union helped in the set up of a branch for poultry farmers. The union is working on setting up a branch for goat breeders and for vegetable farmers in the Jordan Valley, Al Farea, Jenin and Gaza.
5. Five associations in Jericho and the Jordan valley have unified their efforts in implementing common projects to benefit the farmers. A board for the union has been established and an executive office elected and the members increased to reach 523 member which is three time more than the previous figure.
6. The collective purchasing program has been implemented through the associations and gatherings. The program has provided NIS 360,000 worth of supplies in less two months since the program started. NIS 236,000 have been

saved through collective purchasing in the Jericho and Jordan Valley region. At present the union is preparing a draft proposal to implement the program in the rest of the districts.

7. Four projects belonging to farmers associations have been approved totaling \$ 79,000. These projects aim to offer services to the farmers and to develop agriculture.
8. The union is conducting a study together with PARC and other concerned institutions on the associations' requirements.
9. The union is considering to open a fund for the associations in cooperation with banks and lending institutions since an estimated cash flow of \$ 61,000 is available for the associations.

Thirdly: On the level of tax returns on agricultural requirements:

1. NIS 196,300 have been collected as VAT refunds. These returns benefited 114 farmer.
2. A tax consultant has fixed a system to collect the tax returns. This system is to be introduced to other regions like Jenin, Nablus, Tulkarem and Gaza.
3. A petition to claim tax returns on animal purchases has been submitted on behalf of 4000 farmers. The petition is being followed up by 21 of the associations' representatives.
4. A petition to wave taxes and customs on imported agricultural equipment is submitted to the concerned authorities. The union is following this matter up.

Fourthly: On the level life and agricultural insurance:

1. It has been agreed to insure the farmers and their families medically with the Gaza insurance company. The insurance covers up to \$ 195,000 and the policy amounts to \$ 35,000. 1300 people in 90 locations were insured. A total of \$ 106500 were spent on medical treatment, although there were some problems in implementing the program. It proved however to be much better than any of the previous programs.
2. Negotiations with the Ministry of Health are under way to reach an agreement where the farmers can join the governmental medical insurance program. The costs are much lower and therefore can benefit a larger number of farmers. The signing of the agreement is scheduled for 2001.

Fifthly: On the level of participating in formulating laws and regulation relating to the agricultural sector:

1. Participating in a draft relating to a fund for natural disasters for farmers.
2. Participating in workshops on discussing drafts for formulating policies and laws clarifying the role played by the union in setting laws and policies in agriculture.
3. Working with LAW for the purpose of evacuating the chemical factory in Kashouri in the Tulkarem region. This through legal and public procedures.
4. The union has adopted 4 cases of falsified medicines. These cases followed up technically and legally. The farmers' compensation of \$ 13,000 were distributed directly to 9 farmers and benefited a larger group indirectly. These cases activated

the union's relationship with the Ministry of agriculture and the districts. Pamphlets were distributed about each case aiming to raise the farmers awareness.

Sixthly: On the level of implementing Service oriented projects.

1. The union has implemented together Italian G.V.C. and funded by the Welfare association a project on poverty elimination through developing the Palestinian rural areas. The project works in the villages of Tamoun, Seres and is involved in digging wells for irrigation and drinking, the construction of agricultural roads, building of fences and stone terraces, training courses, tree cultivation. The project's budget amounted to \$ 180,000 and benefited more than 123 farmers and 12 farms. The beneficiaries' contribution was around 35%.
2. The union together with PARD is implementing a project funded by the Spanish NGOs aiming to support the union and the agricultural products. The aim is to process the agricultural products in Jenin, Farea, and the Jordan Valley. The projects' total budget is \$ 71,000 and has benefited 200 farmers. The farmers' contribution amounted to 75% of the subsidies agricultural materials.
3. A large portion of the marginalized water project has been implemented together with PARC, the Hydrology group and G.V.C.
4. Service oriented programs have been implemented together with PARC and the Hydrology group in opening roads, seedlings' distribution, well digging, and land reclamation. The union has facilitated the implementation work of about \$ 1,860000 worth of projects in the locations through its committees.
5. There has been cooperation with the Arab Center for Agricultural Development to facilitate the granting of loans to farmer. There has also been cooperation in implementing training programs in various agricultural locations.

Seventhly: On the level of developing the relationship with local and international institutions:

1. The relationship with the official institutions in cooperating to provide services to the farmers, especially with the ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor, the districts, municipalities, village councils and the Ministry of local Governments.
2. The relationship with the non governmental organizations especially PARC, LAW, the Hydrology Group, the Arab Center for Agricultural Development, Land Defense committees and others has been very strong.
3. There has been a very good relationship with international organizations especially, the Welfare association, the Italian Voluntary Group, and the World Bank.
4. A number of meetings were held with international institutions concerned with the Union and in building relations and introducing the union to the Chilian, Dutch, French, Japanese consulates and other institutions.
5. There has been a close relation to other Farmers' Unions in the world like the Italian, French and world Farmers' Unions. Introductory and study visits to these unions took place and a great deal of information gained from their valuable experiences. The union seeks to build a relationship with the Service Unions and with the Italian union of bee hives keepers and the bee hives keepers of the union.

The Palestinian Agricultural sectors lives under very difficult circumstances due to:

1. The fluctuation in agricultural production and problems resulting from exportation as well as the dependency on the Israeli economy which aims to destroy Palestinian agriculture.
2. The increase in the area of land confiscated by Israel, in the uprooting of trees, aggression against farmers and murdering them in some cases, destruction of their lands and preventing them from reaching their lands.
3. The agricultural sector did not receive any attention in building the infrastructure whether locally or internationally.
4. The climatic factor made the situation worse. Lack of rainwater and the increase in the price of fodder had a negative effect on small-scale farmers.

The agricultural sector needs attention in the coming phase. This is a list of our recommendations:

- To work on developing a more stable financial and administrative system.
- Crystallizing the unions structure to suit the work variables.
- A conference for the union to be held at the end of 2000.
- Developing the medical insurance program and enhancing the relations with official and unofficial medical institutions.
- Work on the Union's cadre and increasing its numbers.
- Strengthening the Farmers' Associations program and defining the relation with the union.
- The formation of a specialized media committee for the union.
- The formation of a public relation's committee and setting policies for the union.
- Concentration on the 17% program due to its importance.
- Stress on increasing the number of women members and their representation in executive committees and boards.