

Palestinian Israeli Organic Training Center - PIOTC

Organic Farming & Marketing Training Center

Project Proposal

Purpose of Proposed Project:

The **Palestinian Israeli Organic Training Center PIOTC** will create a joint training farm to train Palestinian and Israeli farmers in organic farming. The center will facilitate organic certification for the participating farmers and teach marketing skills. The PIOTC will establish a cooperative packing house and coordinate receptive markets for its produce.

This will provide a venue for creating working relationships between the farmers, enhance their income by exporting the produce to a receptive European market and improve the health conditions of the local population by using fewer pesticides and will reduce environmental damage.

By joint marketing we can increase the international awareness of cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians and the joint logo will provide a marketing asset.

Justification:

Palestinians and Israelis share this land in uneasy bouts of violence and tolerance. Patrols, fences and military posturing demark a frontier that people are leery to cross, but the pollutants from farming flows freely destroying the very soil being fought over. The farmers today use massive quantities of pesticides and fertilizers in both communities. This is a health hazard which pollutes the air, soil, and ground water. It has a negative impact on the environment, damages natural cycles, and kills off nature's own pest controls. This, in turn, builds up a tolerance in pests which makes them impervious to the pesticides. At this rate when a political solution is found we will be able to share a dead, polluted wasteland. To ensure a future farming capacity the farmers need to shift to sustainable farming techniques. At present, there is no organization which can advise, monitor and certify organic produce in Palestine. The PIOTC would fill this gap.

The wide gap between the Israeli standard of living (~\$18,000) as compared to the standard of living in Palestine (~\$500) is an unacceptable gap that encourages frustration and will be a source of conflict when the political situation is alleviated. The Jenin District Governor and the Mayor of the Gilboa Regional Council have set a goal of raising the standard of the Palestinians living in the region to \$2,500 by the year 2015. By shifting to organic farming and securing a part of the lucrative European organic market we will enhance the income of the local farmers. The use of a joint logo will act as another marketing tool – the consumer gets the additional satisfaction of contributing to peace and understanding besides great organic produce!

Working and sweating together produces personal bonds while creating interdependence between the farmers generates a common incentive for the development and strengthening of the capacity of each farmer and individual. By developing income enhancing endeavors and continually improving the standard of



living and creating a future perspective where there was only despair and poverty, we alleviate some of the tensions in the district and indirectly contribute to creating and environment of peace in the micro region.

Detailed description:

Training for organic farming.

The project will establish an experimental organic training center in the Jenin District / Gilboa region. The center will serve as an agricultural test plot and training facility where farmers and researchers will work together. It will incorporate the following:

Seminar Centre. A centre with accommodation and teaching facilities will be set up that will hold groups who come from the surrounding areas. It will be used by others as the success of the project becomes a focus of interest for groups from other regions and countries.

Demonstration site. As for any educational project, the opportunity to see tangible evidence of successful techniques is the most powerful educational technique yet discovered. A small full time staff will be employed to ensure continuity of techniques.

Research and Development. There are many solutions available today, but in the changing conditions of the future, especially in light of the climatic changes we might expect over the next few years, new techniques for the survival of local agriculture will have to be developed. This activity will be in collaboration with Israeli, Palestinian and foreign universities and the involvement of high schools in the region institution.

Educational centre for high schools and universities. The combination of a seminar centre incorporating demonstration with research is ideal for use by high schools and universities in both the Israeli and the Palestinian sector. This will give additional opportunities for young people from both sides of a conflict filled region to work together, meet each other, and break down negative stereotypes.

Training courses will be held in

- Organic agriculture
- Permaculture
- Composting
- Use of wastewater for agricultural purposes
- Natural predator controls
- Rotational planting
- Short fruit seedlings
- Diversification of crops.
- Marketing



Wastewater treatment using Flowforms and reed beds.

In 1986, at Bier Zeit University, research was done on using the Subsurface Drainage Technique (SDT) units and found it causing no pollution or other harmful effects to the environment. The SDT is done in three phases as follows:

Primary Treatment Phase: which takes place in a septic tank where the solids are allowed to settle.

Secondary Treatment Phase: in which the effluent flows by gravity into a constructed wetland planted with reeds of the Phragmites species are grown, the root zone activities of these plants effectively remove toxins as nutrients from the effluent. These reeds are harvested on a regular basis, the material being composted on the spot.

Tertiary Treatment Phase: in which the biologically treated effluent flows into a field where it is drained through perforated pipes just below the surface. The sewage is treated as it seeps through the soil surrounding the pipes. This would be most appropriate for an orchard of mixed perennial varieties of edible produce.

The advantage of this technique is that it is a low-cost system that requires little maintenance, it does not require deep excavations, it allows for reuse of effluent in a safe manner and generates short-term employment among rural residents.



The project will consist of three phases:

Phase 1 Pilot project. This will entail constructing one unit, utilizing techniques developed abroad, combining them with local skills and conditions, at the same time training apprentices from the villages participating, who will become the multipliers for the third phase. Training courses such as this will be conducted in waste water treatment, evaluating the situation now (inhabitants, farming, resources), evaluating the development in the future, teaching about the possible techniques (constructed wetlands, ponds, aerated tanks, biogas), and moderating the designing process of local plants.

Phase 2 Training units. These will be built as working sewage treatment units, combining construction with the training of a group of apprentices from each village. There will be several such training centers, one in each community.

Phase 3 Multiplication. The apprentices construct additional units in their village, with the PIOTC training center running courses and workshops, and acting as coordinator for the additional units.

The use of treated wastewater for irrigation will give the area an additional resource in addition to using the composted farm solid-waste and effluent waste as fertilizer. This will have the effect of turning waste products into resources, removing the problem of waste and solving the problem of scarce resources.

Establishment of a Palestinian Organic Farming Association Center.

Certification of organic crops grown for export is a key factor for farmers to achieve higher incomes by getting the higher prices commanded by organic crops. At the time of writing, the Israeli Organic Farming Association has an effective and internationally accepted procedure for this for its members. This is crucial for farmers wanting to export produce. PIOTC will be committed to establishing such an association amongst Palestinian organic farmers, training them to document procedures to be acceptable to international scrutiny.

A secretariat for this association will be part of the PIOTC centre.

Cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian farmers in growing and exporting organic produce.

The market for organic produce both domestic and European is expanding exponentially. In order to supply this there will have to be a large increase in the acreage of organic produce. This will be found within within the Palestinian and Israeli sector. It is to the advantage of the Israeli Organic Farming Association to cooperate with Palestinians in order to expand existing production, and to develop joint export ventures. PIOTC will have a secretariat that will work together with Israeli partners in order to develop this.



Creating new employment.

All the above mentioned activities will generate additional employment, related to the production and export of organic farm produce. Further employment opportunities can be found in the food processing sector, pickling olives and other vegetables, cheese making, herb drying, olive oil production, etc.