



# NEF

## What's New

# 90+ YEARS



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The local market is the largest share with individual consumption averaging around 17 kilograms of olive oil per year.

### Full Speed Ahead in Year 2 of NEF's Revitalization of the Palestinian Olive Oil Industry - *posted Sunday, October 01, 2006*

The story of Qusai Hamarneh, a West Bank farmer and press owner from the village of Asyira Alshamaleyeh, is typical. He has been working in olive oil for 20 years, proudly producing premium and extra virgin oils in a traditional industry where he lives. In fact, olive oil constitutes 15 percent of the Palestinian agricultural economy. Qusai followed the usual methods, including storage of his olive oil in plastic containers.

By the end of last season's production, he had a surplus and after examining his oil, separated his surplus into two kinds. He put the premium extra virgin oil into plastic tanks; and the second, lesser quality in stainless steel tanks. Six months passed. Then an oil merchant came to buy--and paid extra money for the lesser of the two oils, the one stored in the stainless steel tanks. The extra virgin oil's quality had deteriorated while stored in the plastic tanks.

From that, Qusai learned an important lesson: "Stainless steel tanks helped increase my income by maintaining an extra virgin quality for my olive oil. NEF's project helped me and other farmers. It introduced advanced tools and equipment to maintain the high quality of olives and olive oil that we produce," Qusai commented, adding, "I will definitely continue using this new storage process."

#### MODERN PRACTICES & EQUIPMENT

Qusai is one of the 105 farmers who have benefited from NEF's (Near East Foundation) revitalization of the Palestinian olive oil industry since September 2005 with a comprehensive pilot program teaching advanced practices and providing modern tools and equipment. Funding came from the World Assembly of Moslem Youth/Saudi Arabia and Human Concern International.

New equipment, especially for harvesting and storage, included saws, plastic boxes, insect traps, ladders, and stainless steel tanks for storage. Also NEF rejuvenated five olive presses serving the cluster of villages around Nablus, where NEF concentrates a wide range of development activities. The presses got laboratory equipment and chemicals to test olive oil quality as well as upgrading certain practices in cultivation, processing and marketing of olives and related products. NEF demonstration sites and direct work with farmers boosted acceptance of these new methods and increased awareness of the potential of a developing, local, olive oil industry.

In summary throughout the pilot year, NEF succeeded in changing traditional storage and harvesting methods, developing new mechanisms leading to better product quality. In the process, farmers improved their incomes and the



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well being of their families. NEF's reputation grew as their livelihoods and lives were enhanced, consequently, farmers and press owners began to seek NEF expertise and assistance to establish agricultural organizations as well as storage centers for their oil.

#### AS A RESULT

NEF has been granted an extension for a second project in the same cluster of villages with funding from the International Fund for Agricultural Development/UN Development Program with five local partners. Begun this June, the project will extend to May 2007 and benefit 453 farmers and five presses in the cluster area.

The project's main goal is to produce 200 tons of extra virgin oil this season. Other objectives include:

- \* **fighting olive flies with state-of-the-art biological methods**--6,000 biological insect traps have been distributed to protect both olives and olive trees thus ensuring extra virgin olive oil.

- \* **equipping farmers with the best tools during the harvesting season**--By late October farmers will receive motor saws, electric harvesting machines and other equipment to enhance their productivity. NEF is even planning to hold a harvesting event throughout this year's picking season, including on-the-job training on the use of new equipment. NEF is also working on supplying electrical harvesting tools and machines for problematic areas near the Separation Wall where farmers are endangered. The machines will finish the job in a shorter time and with less manual labor.

- \* **continuing agricultural extension services and modernization**--NEF is further institutionalizing agricultural services in the cluster by creating training and support groups for farmers in the region, with hopes of duplication in other areas in the West Bank and Gaza.

- \* **increasing olive oil storage capacity from 11 tons to at least 56 tons**--Last year, four stainless steel tanks were positioned in the cluster area while this year, 14 tanks--a volume of four metric tons each--will be distributed. They have clearly demonstrated their high level of protection of olive oil and maintenance of its quality. And stainless steel tanks will replace plastic containers scientifically proven to spoil the oil which absorbs PVC's--as Qusai Hamarneh learned.

- \* **assisting farmers to set production plans for next season during a deteriorating political and economic situation**--And help secure a prosperous future for the Palestinian olive oil industry.

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