



Arab Agronomists Association

جمعية المهندسين الزراعيين العرب

Annual Report – 2023

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1. Who We Are

Vision

A productive society in a free homeland

Mission

A non-governmental, open-membership civil society association registered in the Palestinian territories, working to develop the knowledge of agricultural engineers as part of its contribution to the development of the Palestinian agricultural sector.

Strategic Objectives

1. Contribute to building the capacities of agricultural engineers.
2. Encourage and disseminate applied research in competitive and environmentally friendly agriculture.
3. Strengthen the institution's capacities and secure its sustainability.

Board of Directors

1. Eng. Muqbel Abu Jaish Chairman of the Board
2. Eng. Issa Al-Shatla Vice-Chairman of the Board
3. Eng. Younis Yamin Treasurer
4. Eng. Khaled Qassem.....Secretary
5. Eng. Nihaya Hamouda Member
6. Eng. Yahya Al-Batniji Member
7. Eng. Bilal Al-Azab.....Member

2. Message from the Board of Directors

The year 2023 was marked by a mixture of emotions – pride in success, alongside grief and heartache. We achieved unprecedented progress in the use of treated industrial wastewater for productive agricultural irrigation, while at the same time witnessing catastrophic levels of violence and suffering in Gaza at the end of the year, accompanied by massacres, the destruction of infrastructure and the obliteration of every feature of life.

The Palestinian farmer continued to struggle for freedom and to assert the right to remain steadfast on the land by cultivating it, tending it and harvesting its crops. We had our share in supporting this struggle by rehabilitating agricultural land that had been recovered after confiscation under Israeli court rulings. During the year we also successfully implemented intensive training and mentoring programs that contributed greatly to strengthening farmers' skills and increasing their productivity. We also provided agricultural equipment that helped raise farmers' efficiency and effectiveness, which helped ease the economic pressures and challenges they were facing.

Despite the major challenges imposed by arbitrary Israeli policies, we remain committed to standing by farmers and supporting them to overcome these challenges. We are working seriously to protect their land and interests in the face of existing threats.

The positions taken by donor countries after the events of 7 October highlighted the need to redefine the concept of the independence of civil society organizations, especially in light of recurring crises, and the need – now more than ever – to develop a new vision of immunity and resilience in times of crisis.

We are pleased to share with you our 2023 Annual Report, which includes a comprehensive review of our achievements in supporting and strengthening agriculture, along with farmers' success stories and the development of our agricultural engineers' competencies. We are proud of what we achieved in 2023, and we pledge to continue working hard to strengthen the agricultural sector and support farmers in the coming years. Despite the great challenges, we are determined to achieve success and sustainable progress in our vital agricultural sector.

With the genocide in Gaza continuing, we entered 2024 with heavy hearts, yet determined to challenge the situation and be ready to rise again whenever the opportunity allows. The challenges of this moment require us to give our very best to achieve genuine development.

Eng. Muqbel Abu Jaish

3. Internal Situation of the Association

2023 was a year full of challenges and achievements for the Arab Agronomists Association. While the Association made tangible progress in several projects, the year was also filled with difficulties resulting from political and economic events in the region.

The year ended with major challenges, as the effects of the conflict and violence in Gaza continued, accompanied by destruction, devastation and genocide in the Strip, the dismissal of Palestinian workers employed inside Israel, land confiscation and the erection of checkpoints that obstruct access – all of which affected every aspect of life, including the agricultural sector. Nevertheless, the Association made progress in its projects on the use of treated water for agricultural irrigation, and implemented several intensive training and mentoring programs that helped strengthen farmers' skills and increase their productivity. Agricultural equipment was also provided, which helped raise farmers' efficiency and effectiveness and eased economic pressures and challenges. The Association also faced a decline in funding opportunities due to wars and disasters in the region, and a number of funding decisions concerning Palestine were affected by political positions on the aggression against Gaza, which increased competition for the available funding. In addition, there were ongoing challenges related to the occupation's pursuit of contractors' machinery and repeated work stoppages in border areas, as well as contractors boycotting projects that do not include financial compensation if machinery is seized. Despite these challenges, the Association continued to implement its core projects and to focus on developing the capacities of agricultural engineers. Among the important milestones, we were able to close the project on the use of treated water in agriculture in Al-Wad Al-Shami, which faced many challenges as the first experience of its kind in Palestine.

4. Locations and Target Groups

During 2023, the Association targeted 39 sites in 8 governorates across the homeland through a set of vital projects and activities that respond to farmers' needs. The following tables show the activities, the number of beneficiaries and the targeted sites in each governorate:

Project Name	No. of Families		No. of Household Members	No. of Workers	No. of Workdays
	Men	Women			
Training Program for Agricultural Engineers on Safe Agriculture	64	96	142	3	9
Use of Treated Water in Agriculture in Al-Wad Al-Shami	55	58	565	1	360
Supporting Farmers' Resilience by Improving Agricultural Inputs	1040	178	6894	15	450
One Million Olive Trees for Peace in Palestine	63	0	315	0	0
Qamar Al-Balad Farm, Farkha (Model Ecological Farm)	3	5	30	8	200
Drinking Water Provision in the Beit Dajan Area – Nablus	2	0	10	2	14

#	Governorate	No. of Sites	Village / Town	Activity	Beneficiaries
1	Qalqilya	3	Jayyus, Kafr Thulth, Jinsafut	Distribution of olive harvesters and weed trimmers	211
2	Jenin	9	Nazlat Al-Sheikh Zeid, Kafr Ra'i, Talluza, Rummana, Al-Khuljan, Ya'bad, Dhahr Al-Abed, Umm Dar	Distribution of olive seedlings	38
			Jenin	Training of agricultural engineers	23
3	Tulkarm	7	Al-Ras, Irtah, Far'un, Kafr Zibad	Distribution of olive seedlings	7
			Tulkarm	Training of agricultural engineers	17
			Kafr Jammal, Kafr Zibad	Use of treated water in agriculture	113
4	Nablus	6	Beit Dajan, Madama, Talluza, An-Naqura	Distribution of olive seedlings	16
			Beit Dajan	Construction of rainwater harvesting wells	2
			Nablus	Training of agricultural engineers	28
5	Tubas	1	Tubas	Training of agricultural engineers	29
6	Salfit	7	Farkha	Distribution of olive seedlings; rehabilitation of Qamar Al-Balad	6
			Az-Zawiya, Bruqin, Iskaka, Yasuf, Salfit, Masha	Distribution of olive harvesters and weed trimmers	707
7	Bethlehem	4	Al-Ma'sara, Beit Jala, Nahhalin, Al-Ma'sara	Distribution of olive seedlings	12
8	Hebron	2	Adh-Dhahiriya	Opening of an agricultural road	96
			Hebron	Training of agricultural engineers	45

5. Overview of the Association's Projects

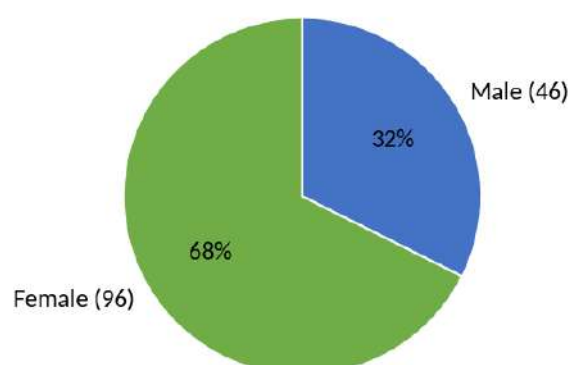
During 2023, the Association closed projects that had been implemented during 2022 and, at the same time, launched new phases of existing programs. The projects and activities were as follows:

5.1 Training Program for Agricultural Engineers on Safe Agriculture – First Cohort

A series of training courses on safe agriculture was organized for recently graduated engineers, with the aim of developing their skills and raising their competence to enter the labor market. The courses covered several specialized topics such as organic agriculture, environmental procedures in vineyards and their management, and GLOBALG.A.P. fundamentals. The training series was implemented in several governorates and locations in cooperation with the Palestinian Agricultural Engineers Syndicate and An-Najah University, and was delivered by a group of qualified trainers. A total of 6 courses were held over 17 days with the participation of 142 trainees, covering both theoretical and practical aspects to achieve maximum benefit. The trainees comprised 46 male and 96 female agricultural engineers. Participants benefited greatly from these courses, as they covered topics not included in university curricula and raised their skills and technical knowledge in various fields.

No.	Training Title	Branch	No. of Days	No. of Hours	Male	Female	Total
1	Organic agriculture; environmental procedures in vineyards and their management	Hebron	3	18	13	32	45
2	Organic agriculture	Tulkarm	3	8	4	13	17
3	Organic agriculture	Nablus	2	14	12	16	28
4	Organic agriculture	Jenin	3	18	6	17	23
5	GLOBALG.A.P. fundamentals	Tubas	3	18	11	18	29
Total			14	76	46	96	142

Training participation by gender





5.2 Use of Treated Water in Agriculture in Al-Wad Al-Shami

The success of this project lies in its being the first of its kind in the use of treated industrial wastewater. The project aimed to improve the quality of the treated water produced by the Cappy factory so that it could be used in agricultural production. The factory succeeded in meeting the specifications of the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, so that the water can be used within a water management system supervised by the Kafr Jammal Cooperative Society.

During implementation, the project worked to strengthen knowledge and awareness among farmers, women and students by carrying out 13 awareness and cultural activities on the effects of treated water on the environment and health, in order to prepare the community to accept the idea of using treated water for agriculture in Al-Wad Al-Shami. A total of 25 farmers, 20 housewives and 72 students were trained on topics that help raise awareness and encourage adoption of the project.

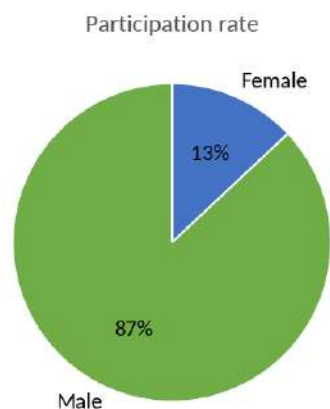
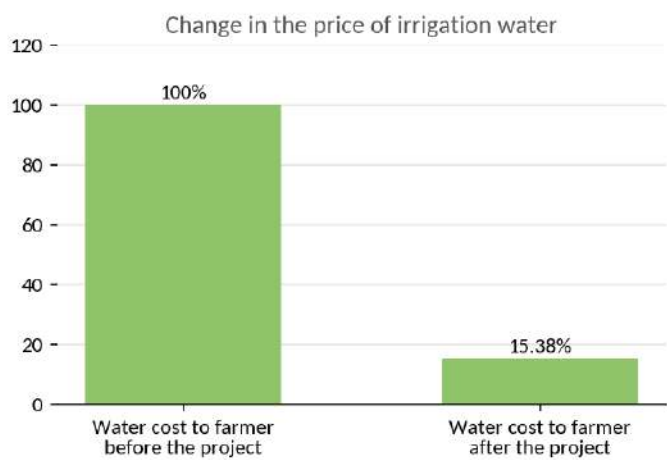
The project also provided the infrastructure needed to manage the water and distribute it fairly among farmers, carried out rehabilitation works on agricultural land, and distributed the agricultural inputs needed to protect crops from wild animals, in addition to distributing a number of fruit-tree seedlings.

This project is therefore considered the first of its kind in Palestine and, by achieving its objectives, it offers hope for improving and expanding agricultural water sources by treating water in other areas. This in turn solves an environmental problem related to the discharge of industrial wastewater, and transforms factory water into safe agricultural sources, contributing to agricultural sustainability and providing sufficient quantities of water for farmers. It also helps protect the environment and reduce the impact of industrial wastewater discharge on the surrounding area.

Through this project, more agricultural areas in Palestine can benefit from the same approach to treating factory water. As a result, significant improvements can be achieved in the availability and quality of

agricultural water, supporting the agricultural economy and strengthening environmental sustainability in the region.

Notably, the project served 50 dunums of agricultural land, provides 90 cubic meters of treated water daily, and completely eliminated the environmental nuisance.



5.3 Supporting Farmers' Resilience by Improving Agricultural Inputs in Qalqilya, Salfit and Hebron

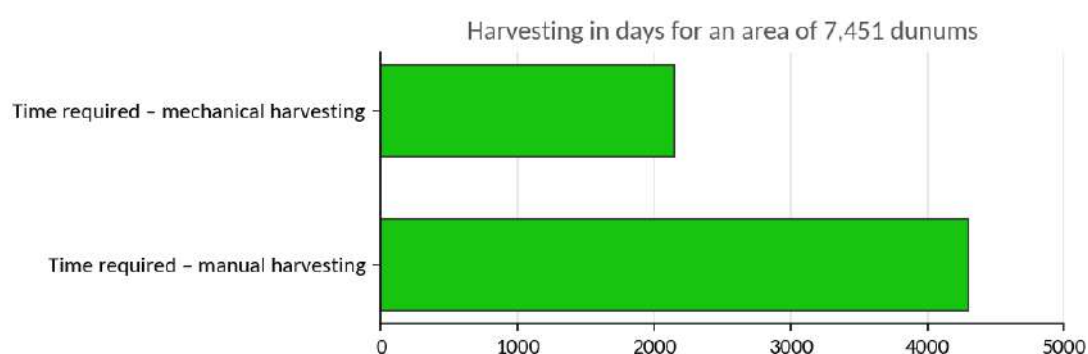
The project "Supporting Farmers' Resilience by Improving Agricultural Inputs in Qalqilya, Salfit and Hebron", funded by the United Nations Humanitarian Fund, was implemented in 12 sites (Iskaka, Yasuf, Jinsafut, Az-Zawiya, Bruqin, Jayyus, Deir Istiya, Salfit, Kafr Thulth, Ad-Dab'a, Masha and Annab Al-Kabira) in the Qalqilya, Salfit and Hebron governorates. The project aims to strengthen farmers' resilience by improving agricultural inputs, and addresses the challenges faced by farmers in areas close to settlements and the separation wall by providing essential agricultural equipment and rehabilitating agricultural roads. The project contributes to improving food security and increasing the productive capacity of small-scale farmers, helping to protect livelihoods and reduce the negative impacts of the occupation and the harsh climate.

Main outputs:

- Distribution of 137 olive harvesting machines and 130 weed-cutting machines.
- Rehabilitation of 8.3 km of agricultural roads.
- Installation of 600 meters of water conveyance pipes.
- Serving 1,218 farmers (6,894 people).

Governorate	Sites	Activities	No. of Beneficiaries
Qalqilya	Ad-Dab'a, Jinsafut, Jayyus, Kafr Thulth	Distribution of olive harvesters and weed trimmers	2312
Salfit	Az-Zawiya, Bruqin, Salfit, Iskaka, Masha, Yasuf, Wadi Qana	Distribution of olive harvesters and weed trimmers; roads; water	3975
Hebron	Annab Al-Kabir	Roads	607

The use of olive harvesters and weed trimmers had a major impact in speeding up olive picking and weed clearing on land located behind the wall or near military zones, enabling farmers to double their output, as shown in the following chart:



Distribution of olive harvesters



In the town of Ad-Dab'a, 4 km of agricultural roads running alongside the separation line were rehabilitated, serving agricultural land recovered from occupation control following a court ruling. This road is the only access point to dozens of dunums planted with olives. It also serves as an alternative road linking Ad-Dab'a with the village of Kafr Thulth, greatly reducing the hardship and time needed to cross to the other side.



Some photos of road rehabilitation

In Wadi Qana, farmers were able to bring metal water pipes into the valley, replacing 600 meters of plastic pipes that are almost routinely vandalized by settlers. This will greatly contribute to a regular and continuous water supply to the valley, improving production for more than 60 farmers.

The Wadi Qana area is surrounded by 13 settlements and is a nature reserve, where it is difficult to make any change or carry out rehabilitation. Solving the recurring problem of plastic pipes being constantly damaged by settlers – who aim to harass farmers holding on to their crops – is therefore a major success story, considering that these attacks recur monthly or even weekly.



5.4 One Million Olive Trees for Peace in Palestine

In 2023, the Arab Agronomists Association implemented an activity aimed at distributing 4,800 olive seedlings, funded by a group of solidarity associations: the French-Palestinian Solidarity Association (AFPS – Alsace and Lorraine region), the Palestine Friendship Association (Besançon and Dole), and the Palestine Friendship Association of Aulnay-sous-Bois. The seedlings were distributed in 8 governorates across 14 sites. The beneficiaries numbered 65 farmers – 325 people in total – on agricultural land covering 340 dunums.

The project targeted small-holder farmers whose land lies in critical areas at risk of confiscation.



5.5 Qamar Al-Balad Farm, Farkha (Model Ecological Farm)

The farm continues to grow, expand and plant more trees, making use of every available meter. The number of olive and grape trees has been increased to 78 fruit-bearing olive trees and 90 grapevines. More than 100 additional square meters of retaining walls were built, and more than half a dunum was reclaimed, bringing the developed area to 10 dunums out of a total of 14 dunums – all through self-funding and self-help efforts.

In pursuit of the vision of building an integrated model farm, a barracks-style shed was established as a poultry unit for organic animal production on an area of one dunum, and it has been supplied with local manure. Work is currently under way to rehabilitate a second cave, larger than the first, to prepare it for mushroom cultivation.

Given the importance of planting medicinal herbs to preserve the soil of reclaimed land, 300 thyme seedlings were planted, bringing the total number of seedlings to 1,000. Maintaining diverse crops also prevents the depletion of soil nutrients, while at the same time supplying the soil with the elements it needs by turning crop residues into organic compost that feeds it. Last year, seasonal cultivation focused on producing broad beans, spinach, peas, potatoes, radishes and parsley, with the following yields:

Potatoes 350 kg – spinach 100 kg – peas 60 kg – radishes 10 kg. Onions and bika were also planted. Preparations are now under way for the summer season, when cucumbers (faqqous) and zucchini will be planted.

The farm received initiative support from the Bisan Center to plant 2,600 hot-pepper seedlings for the benefit of the Farkha Women's Association, to produce chili paste (shatta) for commercial purposes. This development widened the circle of community benefit: 5 families now work on the farm and earn a living from it, cooperating in its work and follow-up. In addition, the farm absorbed and employed 3 workers from Gaza who were stranded in the West Bank for 5 months as a result of the recent aggression.

As a model ecological farm, it attracts the attention of local and international news agencies specialized in the environmental and agricultural fields. American, British and German reports, as well as local Arab reports, have been published about the farm. It has also hosted a number of local delegations of interested people from cooperatives and municipalities, such as Burqa, as well as school students and women's groups.

Since the farm's establishment, the goal has been to provide a complete, integrated model – a living example of a productive model ecological farm, founded on barren land that had not been cultivated since the 1970s.



5.6 Drinking Water Provision in the Beit Dajan Area – Nablus

During 2023, the donor AFPS responded on an emergency and humanitarian basis by providing a grant to build two household agricultural wells for two families in special circumstances. Accordingly, two wells were built, each with a capacity of 60 cubic meters, providing two job opportunities. This activity is part of a program to provide household agricultural water wells for residents of the Beit Dajan area (Nablus district), who suffer from water scarcity and summer water cuts and are constantly exposed to settler attacks.

6. Highlights

6.1 Main Project Outputs



6.2 Success Story

Rasmiya Youssef is a widowed farmer in her early sixties who supports her family. She used to cultivate crops between the olive trees on the land she inherited from her husband, living off it, and she and her children picked olives for other families for pay to improve their situation. She benefited from the distribution of mechanical olive harvesters. During one of our field visits we met her, and she was very happy and relieved: the harvester helped her pick olives with much less effort, which suited her age and physical condition, and it reduced harvesting time by 50%.

These factors enabled her to harvest larger quantities than in previous years, which had a good economic impact on the family.



6.3 Challenges Faced by the Association in 2023

Like other development organizations in the country, the Arab Agronomists Association faced a number of obstacles and difficulties that affected the course of its work, including:

1. The occupation's pursuit of contractors' machinery and the repeated suspension of work in border areas, especially on the Ad-Dab'a border road linking the town of Ad-Dab'a with the town of Kafr Thulth.
2. A decline in funding opportunities due to wars and disasters in the region, and strong competition for the available funding.
3. Contractors boycotting, by decision of the Palestinian Contractors Union, projects that do not include financial compensation if machinery is seized by the occupation.
4. The absence of previous experience with industrial wastewater treatment plants to learn from, which greatly contributed to extending the project implementation period.

7. Memberships and Directions

7.1 Association Memberships

The Association is a committed member of the Palestinian NGOs Network (PNGO) and the Palestinian Environmental NGOs Network (PENGON), and a committed member of the FSS Cluster and the WASH Cluster. Out of its belief in the necessity and importance of building internal and external networks, the Association has applied to join the International Land Coalition (ILC). It is also a member of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and the local CORDA network, and a member of the boards of directors of Reef Finance Company and Reef Marketing Company.

7.2 Directions for 2024

The Association seeks to focus on a number of directions aligned with its vision, which fall under:

5. Targeting recently graduated agricultural engineers and developing and building their capacities through training. This aim has clearly materialized in specializing and expanding in this area by implementing specialized ecological agriculture courses in 3 locations (north, center and south), giving everyone the opportunity regardless of where the engineer is based.
6. Continuing the reclamation and development of the ecological farm, with the goal of turning it into an educational ecological farm used to train agricultural engineers in sustainable ecological agriculture.
7. Finding new and diverse funding sources and working towards self-financing through income-generating projects, as permitted by law, in a way that safeguards the Association's continuity.
8. Expanding relations and memberships in regional networks to exchange expertise and experiences.
9. Building partnerships with the private sector to implement agro-ecological projects that serve multiple stakeholders.

8. Cooperation, Coordination and Funding

8.1 Cooperation and Coordination with Civil, Governmental and Private Institutions

1. The Association maintained continuous cooperation with the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture as the competent authority, in addition to the Quality Authority as the body mandated to follow up on certain activities falling under its responsibilities.
2. Cooperation also took place with local municipal and village councils in the sites where activities were implemented.
3. Cooperation continued with the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees (PARC) under agreements to benefit from its network of offices and branches, and in following up on the achievements of some projects.
4. For the third consecutive year, a number of events and trainings were implemented in cooperation with the Palestinian Engineers Association.

8.2 Funding Partners

The Arab Agronomists Association extends its deepest thanks and gratitude to everyone who has contributed with it to providing essential services to the Palestinian farmer and agricultural engineer – the cornerstone of the development and revival of the Palestinian agricultural sector. We especially thank:

- The Humanitarian Fund (OCHA)
- French-Palestinian Solidarity Association (Alsace and Lorraine region) – AFPS
- Palestine Friendship Association (Besançon and Dole)
- Palestine Friendship Association of Aulnay-sous-Bois
- Châteaubriant Palestine Committee
- French Solidarity Association – Yuni
- Global Environment Facility – Small Grants Programme – UNDP
- ICARDA

End