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EU helps Palestinian olive farmers with a new €2.2 million programme

The European Union (EU) has launched a €2.2 million programme to support farmers dealing with olive and olive oil production in the occupied Palestinian territory including Area C. The project will improve the livelihood and food security of poor rural families by supporting both the institutional development of the Ministry of Agriculture in creating a business-conducive environment in the sector and producers along the whole olive and olive oil value chain.

At the institutional level the project will support all relevant public and private bodies in order to facilitate private investment. On the ground the project will provide technical assistance to farmers to overcome current production limitations, increase the availability and improve the management of water, and enhance the processing of the olive oil. The three-year project is in line with the recently approved 'Palestinian Agriculture Sector Strategy' and is implemented by Oxfam GB and PARC/ADA.

"Through our continuous work with Palestinian farmers, we have witnessed a true improvement in their production capacity regardless of the difficulties they face. The results achieved so far are rewarding and Palestinian olive oil has reached new markets across the world", said John Gatt-Rutter, the Acting EU Representative.

This new EU investment in the sector builds on previous initiatives and is in line with the national strategy for the development of agriculture as well as with other donors' interventions. Previously, Oxfam with EU support worked with 31 cooperatives/producer groups (approximately 2500 individuals including almost 900 women) to increase the productivity of their orchards and quality of their olive oil and connect the farmers to external markets, particularly Fair Trade markets.

Previously the Agricultural Development Association (ADA/PARC), co-funded by the EU, worked to increase the income of small olive producers and processors in vulnerable rural areas; this improved the income and standards of living for 1240 small olive producers within 13 - both newly established and existing - organic certified cooperatives and processors and 7 mills. In addition, the Palestinian farmers' production capacity increased to reach around 730 tons of organic olive oil which has been marketed to the local and international markets.

Background:

Agriculture is an important sector of the Palestinian economy due to its high share of GDP, its contribution to total exports, and as provider of both long-term and temporary employment. Agriculture remains a vehicle for improving food security, driving economic growth, and – significantly – can be a shock absorber for the population in times of crisis.

Within the sector, olive and olive oil production is among the most important. Olive groves represent more than half the total cultivated land in the occupied Palestinian territory, with approximately 10 million trees, and a potential for export to international markets.

The EU has consistently been supporting Palestinian rural development – with particular attention to the most vulnerable population. The olive oil sub-sector, the treatment of waste water for reuse in agriculture and the livestock sector are among the main areas of intervention. In the coming years - through its food security programme - the EU will invest € 16 million in these areas.

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