



Concept Paper

Canaan Organic Research and Extension Center

Jenin, Palestine

The Canaan Organic Research and Extension Center, is a not-for-profit center located in the rich agricultural region of Jenin in Northern Palestine, will serve as a national central location for conducting research, education and extension activities to promote organic production and marketing of fruits, vegetables and grains in Palestine. The establishment of the Canaan Research and Extension Center on Organic Farming represents a unique opportunity for Palestine and Palestinians to engage in and benefit from research and education that will provide new agronomic and marketing opportunities for small producers and their families, provide essential training and extension activities in ecological farming systems, build community organizations and serve to revitalize many of the rich agricultural and social traditions. The Center will be another vehicle to realize Canaan's mission of empowering Palestinian farming communities to sustain their livelihood and afford them a space in modern society.

The recent success of producing and marketing of organic olive oil produced by small family farmers and marketed internationally through **Canaan Fair Trade** in Palestine has demonstrated the potential of export markets for organically grown products produced and processed in Palestine. Through organic agriculture research and training that are linked to infrastructures of producing cooperatives, producers' unions, processing and exporting facilities within on going organic and fair trade certification, marketing, and promotion programs the center will help re-establish traditional farming methods to be utilized and embraced by the modern organic/ecological movement and markets locally and internationally, thereby creating a space for the small traditional farming family in the modern world. In addition, the center will help farmers devise the techniques and methods necessary to give the traditional organic methods an economic advantage through an increase in yields and lower costs of inputs. Moreover, the introduction of organic/ecological farming practices will serve to help Palestinian growers break their current dependence on expensive chemical inputs through the introduction of on-farm fertility and pest control methods such as legume cover-cropping, green manures, composting, crop rotations, use of traditional seed varieties, etc. Thus, producing organic agricultural goods will present an opportunity for grassroots farmers, women cooperative members, and youth to participate and take ownership in economic activities that are both rewarding and culturally meaningful.

In order for farmers to make the transition from conventional farming practices to organic production systems and to build the necessary community organizations, an extensive program of research, training, extension and education based upon the cultural and economic realities that currently exist in Palestine is essential. The Canaan Research and Extension Center on Organic Farming will provide the needed research agenda to seek appropriate solutions and methods for successful organic production in Palestine, and to provide the necessary extension and education essential for the transfer of suitable technology to growers and their families.

Through the extensive contacts and international experience of the Center's founder, Dr. Nasser Abufarha and his associates, The Canaan Research and Extension Center on Organic Farming will become an active participant within the existing global network of organic farming research and educational centers throughout the United States, Europe, Africa, and South and Central America, providing opportunities for the international exchange of university faculty, students and farmers to share research agendas and participate in educational programs. Within this global context, the Center will utilize a multidisciplinary, holistic anthropological approach to its research and educational agenda. Emphasis will be placed on research and education activities oriented towards reviving traditional farming and cultural practices and articulating them within modern global organic/ecological movements and markets.

Perhaps the most important element in reviving traditional agronomic practices is the encouragement of using regional, non-hybrid seed varieties that are especially adapted to local environmental conditions and are particularly resistant to pest and disease problems. Efforts will focus on the collection, preservation and distribution of traditional seed varieties of vegetables, spices, grains and fruits and help farmers realize profitable yields from these seeds as well as encouraging the traditional processing and utilization of these commodities. Other individual research activities will include the evaluation of regional legumes appropriate for green manures and cover-crops, interactions between animal and crop production, crop rotation regimes and soil building techniques such as terracing, contour planting, etc. Extension activities will include non-formal education, farmer's field days, the establishment of on-farm demonstration plots and the development and distribution of straight-forward technical manuals for farmers and their families. Training efforts will focus on helping local farmers learn to better utilize their on-farm resources such as soil, water, manure and crop residues as well as the use of natural pest and disease control. In addition to agronomic activities, the Center will also focus efforts towards community/cultural development through the establishment and collaboration with existing farmer's organizations, women's cooperatives, and youth development activities as well as involving local schools, religious organizations, NGOs and governmental agencies with the Center's activities.

For further information regarding the Canaan Organic Research and Extension Center and its mission, please contact: center@canaanfairtrade.com