

The Jordan Valley's Finest Medjoul Dates



The rich fertile land of the Jordan Valley gives birth to many sweet, succulent fruits, one of which is our customers' favourite – the Medjoul Date.

Not long ago Ibrahim Doik and many of the other date farmers in Jericho were having to sell their dates below cost price and even having to give them away for fear of them rotting before being consumed. Their problem? Their largest competitors were selling their dates at way below cost price (enabled by government subsidies) making Ibrahim and the other Palestinian farmers' dates too expensive for consumers to be tempted. The competitors were of course – The large illegal Israeli settlements in the Jordan Valley.

Now Ibrahim and the farmers have some hope. Recently they started exporting their high quality Jordan Valley medjoul dates to the UK, through Zaytoun. Zaytoun is the only UK importer of Palestinian dates, and although at the moment the farmers are exporting small quantities, they hope that with the support of the UK consumers, they will be able to export the bulk of their produce, which in the past has gone to waste.

The farmers in the Jordan Valley began their plantation of date trees in Jericho in 2000. But ofcourse like any project that aims to give the Palestinians a better life, it was met with much hostility by the Israelis. Israeli military tanks approached the land and helicopters flew overhead announcing that it was forbidden for farmers to work on the land. The farmers continued against the odds and now their plantation is thriving despite the many obstacles they are faced with.

The land is rented from the Islamic Awqaf and as there is plantation activity on the land, it is more difficult for the Israelis to confiscate the land, which is something that regularly happens.

The Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee (PARC) work very closely with the farmers in all aspects of the date farming, from planting through to exporting. One of the most exciting developments for the farmers is the building of a new factory in Jericho for automatic sorting and grading of the dates. The factory also has a cooling system that will store the dates at a suitable temperature, and freeze some, giving the farmers more opportunities to sell their dates, rather than having to sell them at any price to avoid them rotting. The factory which is near completion is a million dollar project enabled by loans from abroad.



Previously the dates were sorted manually, but now the automatic machines will be able to sort the dates by colour, size, weight and moisture content.

Although the future is looking better for the date farmers, Ibrahim Doik who is also the head of the Palestinian Farmers Union stresses that the farmers still have many obstacles hindering their progress. From the 80 tonnes of dates they produce, it is only a small number, approx 5 tonnes, which are currently being exported abroad. The farmers need this number to increase as it is only by selling abroad that the farmers are getting a fair price. Locally the farmers cannot compete with the Israeli settlement produce and although the Palestinian Authority would like to take steps to assist the farmers, the cheap settlement dates will always find a market in Palestine, where everyone is struggling to afford basic food items.



The production costs for the dates are high, so there is no possibility of marketing the dates in surrounding Arab countries. The only other market is the Gulf countries who can afford to pay a little bit more.

The other major obstacle that every Palestinian experiences on a daily basis is one that also affects the date farmers, and that is the problem of access to water. With Israel and the settlers stealing most water resources and Palestinians not being able to dig wells, the farmers are having to do their best to make sure that their dates can compete with the quality of settlement dates, which have water in abundance.



Despite all the difficulties, PARC and the farmers are steadfast in their right to be able to produce and sell dates from their own land. The Jordan Valley has a diversity of soil that enables them to produce all sorts of fruits that are not grown in abundance elsewhere. With more support from consumers in the UK the farmers hope to be able to increase production so they can stand on their own feet and earn a living with the dignity they deserve.