

PRODUCER PROFILES

Haja women's association Near Tulkarm

Bassema Basalat is a Palestinian mother of 4 as well as an olive and za'atar producer. She lives in Haja village with her farmer husband and an extended farming family. She also trained as an architect - *"Women are best at multi-tasking"* she laughs.

In 2004 she co-founded the women's development association in Haja, to help train women to be economically independent, and bring much-needed income to their families. Partnering with companies like Zaytoun enables the women to learn more about overseas markets for their produce.

It's not simply about sales, however, for these women as for many others in Palestine, their contribution to their community is growing ever more important as Palestinian society and economy evolves under occupation. Through fairly trading their products sales to UK customers the women's income enable them to undertake further training, and perhaps to develop their produce to qualify for international Fair Trade and organic certification.

Palestinian women follow their ancestor's ways, in preparing the traditional foods of za'atar (a mix of thyme, toasted sesame seeds and sumac) and maftool (Palestinian couscous). In addition to the olive harvest which is gathered by the whole family, these delicious foods are a staple of the Palestinian diet, and the women are delighted now to be able to offer it to customers in faraway lands.

Bassema is proud of her heritage *"My favourite recipes use za'atar – I plant the herbs in my land, watch them growing and mill them for my own kitchen"* - and knows that in following her grandmothers' footsteps, she is providing for her family and her community.

Bassema's own family is facing land theft from nearby Israeli settlements. 20 dunums of her own olive grove is no longer accessible due to illegal building of the settlements Moshah Zohar and Qarne Shomron. This loss affects not only her ability to provide food and income, but her family's whole way of life.

"Our Friday activity is to go and plant olive trees, for our future and for the children as well. We love the olive tree as part of the family"



Bassema Basalat



THE FACTS

Location: **Haja Village
Nr Tulkarm, Palestine**

Established: **2004**

Members: **25**

Farm size: **500 dunums**

