



## PRODUCER PROFILES

# Burqin cooperative, near Jenin, Palestine

Born in Jenin refugee camp, Um Shehadeh is originally from the village of Zar'in near Haifa. While both her parents come from a farming community the political realities that left them refugees in the city of Jenin made it impossible for them to continue in their agricultural tradition. But Um Shehadeh is reviving her ancestral heritage in the village of Burqin, just a couple of kilometers from the refugee camp. Aside from growing local varieties of zucchini, squash, and cucumbers, Um Shehadeh makes sun-dried tomatoes, couscous, and organic olive oil soap with the local women coop in her village. In her small home in the center of Burquien Um Shehadeh operates a small chicken hatchery and works on a sewing machine hemming cloths. Her interests are reading and mathematics but unfortunately, she never finished school. *"I left school in my senior year because our situation at home was difficult so I learned sewing and started earning a living."* But that never stopped Um Shehadeh from pursuing her dreams and discovering her talents. When she joined the women coop of Burqin and the Palestine Fair Trade Association, she took an English class through PFTA where she said she discovered that she has talents.

Along with her gift as a seamstress, an agriculturalist, and a creative mother, Um Shehadeh has the skill of leadership. This is why in May of 2010 she ran for elections in the Palestine Fair Trade Association to be elected as the only woman on the board. Amidst an environment that is mostly dominated by men, Um Shehadeh says, *"PFTA and Cnaan Fair Trade create a new cultural atmosphere for women. I am engaged in my community in a way I did not think I could be before. I feel supported by my coop and by the farmers themselves. This shows me that aside from making Maftoul and sun-dried tomatoes I am also part of a movement that is creating progress through agricultural work."*

Many people may think that women's empowerment has to come from an urban context but Um Shehadeh serves as a great example of how real progress comes from within the community and through the work that makes ideological slogans a tangible reality. Um Shehadeh and the other women of the Burqin coop no longer feel that independence is a far-fetched goal.



Um Shehadeh with child

## THE FACTS

**Burqin, part of the  
Palestine Fair Trade  
Association**

**Location: near Jenin,  
Palestine**

**Established: 2004**

**Members: 1700**



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*"Canaan Fair Trade supports us in becoming a stronger coop. They offer us space; raw material and most of all they buy our products. This is important because now we are looking at land to buy for our coop to create our own women's center. The women will participate in paying the expense of the place and Canaan helped us get a grant to start." When asked why she thought this was important, Um Shehadeh said, "This means we will establish a women share coop in our village and it will give us capital. Each woman will own shares, and rights to the land and the profit. This is what will make our lives more independent and most of all healthy, self-sustainable and economically viable. This is huge for us!"*

Alongside the women's center Um Shehadeh dreams of having an international center in Burqin. *"Our village is very unique. We have one of the oldest churches in the world and our people are very welcoming. Our kids love meeting people from different places in the world. We can work on this and create a center in our village where people will learn about us and our kids who are imprisoned by the occupation and the wall can meet the world through the eyes of internationals who will come to visit."*

At a glance, Um Shehadeh may give the impression of a timid woman but it takes less than five minutes of conversation with her to discover that you have encountered a mega woman who is defying any limitations and standing steadfast as a lighthouse in an otherwise grim situation. Her daughter, Nour, which means light in Arabic, is only nine years old but she is already following her mother's footsteps. In an executive tone she watches her mother making Maftoul and offers her critique while filling the house with vibrations of joy coming from her elated laughter as she commands, *"Mom, its time for you to take a break!"*



*Um Shehadeh Checking on Sun-dried Tomatoes*



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