

Al Jalameh Village



A FRUIT NOT FAR FROM ITS TREE

It would be an incomplete effort to write about Canaan Fair Trade's producer community without including the story of Al Jalameh. Although not one of the olive oil producing villages, Al Jalameh is the home of the first Zataar making women cooperative, olive tree nursery, and Canaan Fair Trade's founder, Nasser Abufarha, whose vision contributed to the revitalization of the olive oil sector significantly making Palestinian olive oil a staple ingredient in kitchens and fair trade shops across the globe. Located only five kilometers north of Jenin city, Al Jalameh's population is a little less than 3000 people who have always had a spirit of innovation. Famous for its vegetables and fresh produce, Al Jalameh was one of the first villages to acquire a tractor, which was

bought by a group of six people who established the earliest share-based cooperative in the area. It is no surprise that spearheading these initiatives was Ahmed Abed El Hadi, Nasser Abufaraha's late father who at the early age of 22 years old became a well-known figure for his work in agriculture. With little capital, the women in Abed El Hadi's family sold their gold to buy the first tractor and became share holders of the profits that the men made from offering plowing services to farmers in surrounding villages. Influenced by the worker unions in Haifa and other cultural figures of their time, people in Al Jalameh are also known for being a place where public debates and *Zajal*, a type of improvised poetry, took place. Until this day, the small village holds major events or forums that carry these traditions on a smaller scale. Hidden amongst grape vines and fields of cauliflower,

Abu Ayman and Majed built a gathering place that they consider their center. Boiling coffee on a small fire in the open tent, Majed says, “The center’s coffee is the best. If you have any trouble and you drink it here then your heart will be released from all its worries. This is a place where we fortify our partnership as farmers working together but really it has come to play an important role socially here. We host cultural events in it and social gatherings of people who love poetry and life.”



Abu Ayman picking grapes



Faysal in his nursery

THE AGRICULTURAL CENTER

Indeed, Abu Ayman and Majed’s partnership is another great model in the Jalameh tradition of forming formal and informal cooperative endeavors. While Majed and his brother Khaled are the official owners of the land, Abu Ayman and Majed are equal partners in their work together growing Mulokheye (jute leaf), grapes, and a variety of delicious vegetables. Hanging out with Abu Ayman as he proudly displays this season’s grape, he explains that since Canaan Fair Trade was founded many people from different places around the world started to come to Al Jalameh and to their collective agricultural center in particular. “We feel like our gathering place has become like a welcoming center and when foreigners come they enjoy drinking tea and coffee with us while they learn about what we do agriculturally. And of course we learn from them too.”

FIVE SEEDS

On the other side of the gathering place is Faysal’s olive tree nursery. Spread across a large plain, the nursery is divided into three different plots where Faysal grows thousands of saplings each year. “It takes three years for the seed to sprout and become a full sapling that I can sell. This is why I have to divide the plot into three different sections.” He says, “in early September I fill up almost 20,000 bags with soil and compost material and then I put the seeds. Five seeds in each bag and in four months they start sprouting and after one year I graft the scions to the wild olive roots. The root has to always be from the wild variety because it is disease resistant and its roots go deep looking for water.” Gently caressing the leaves of one of his newly grafted saplings Faysal explains, “It is important for a farmer to have a long term vision. If I want immediate gains then I would not be doing this. I have to be very organized and patient creating a cycle where I am ready each year for the next one.” To him growing saplings is not something that he takes lightly because he considers



the health of the olive tree essential for the community's food security and future. Like many in Jalameh, Faysal says that his adventurous spirit and his ability to adjust to changes are the reasons why he is a successful farmer. Indeed people in Jalameh had to adjust to many changes in recent history from the building of a major checkpoint that has separated them from their neighboring villages and cities where they used to work inside Israel. One of the biggest ordeals this small village had to go through is the uprooting of its orange fields that it was once famous for. It would be hard to imagine that this village was once a place of hundreds of orange groves today but Faysal says that oranges were in fact its major crop. A combination of political events and a growing Israeli government control over farmer's resources in Al Jalameh meant producers could not maintain their citrus fields. "The cost of water which citrus trees need a lot of became so high and cheaper oranges that were being mass produced in industrial farms took over the market and then the Israeli government uprooted a large number of orange trees for the building of surrounding roads to bypass the village." With a heavy heart Faysal says, "My father cried for three days straight when the oranges were uprooted because he considered our *Bayara* (grove) and the trees like his children."

TENACIOUS ORANGES

However, none of these challenges have stopped this community from flourishing and maintaining a pioneering spirit throughout its history. From digging for water in the early 60s to being a destination for poetry lovers, Al Jalameh maintains a strong community that has an incomparable confidence in its heritage. Abu Bassam, known as Al Jalmawi, is one of Palestine's *Zajal* poetry icons. He is in his late eighties and still gets invited to events and weddings across the country to perform his improvisational poetry and participate in what is called *Hadada*; a kind of poetic fencing where the *Zajala* (the poets) compete in improvised spoken word and rhythmic poetry. And like many in Al Jalameh Abu Bassam takes special pride in his craft as a medium for positive social change by providing critical poetry. His son Nu'man is one of the most prominent folklore singers in Palestine and he is the star of the Jaru'a Olive Harvest Festival.

Looking at all that has come out of Al Jalameh one would not be able to doubt this community's

commitment to social change. From critical poetry to influential social entrepreneurship Al Jalameh continues to produce more than vegetables. Perhaps it is no longer an orange producing village but those grandfathers and grandmothers who planted citrus trees seem to have also planted a deep rooted tenaciousness in their children that continues to sprout visions for a better future.



Renowned poet Abu Bassam Al Jalmawi



Jalameh checkpoint crossing

