

# Maha Yousef

CANAAN FAIR TRADE MEMBER OF WOMEN COOP FROM BURQIN VILLAGE



## COOKING FOR THE WHOLE WORLD

Before 38 year old Maha Yousef got married, she was considered an introvert in her village. If you were to meet Maha today it would be impossible to imagine that shy woman because with her wide smile and witty comments she can charm almost anyone she meets. A founding member of the Burqin women's cooperative, Maha started recruiting women and bringing new people into the work her mother, mother-in-law, and she were already doing. "My mother-in-law and I had to make food for many people. We are a big family so we thought if we could make these amounts in our homes why not learn to feed even more people. We thought this way we benefit and so do others. But we never thought we

would be making Maftoul for the whole world! It is an incredible feeling to know that what you do in the small quarters of your own kitchen can be valued in big restaurants and shops around the world!"

## CHALLENGING THE MEN!

Using the social skills she thought she never had, Maha was able to cultivate wide support for their coop and work together with the women to develop a new product, which is today Canaan Fair Trade's distinguished olive oil soap that is made from organic olive and coconut oil. "The idea of making the soap started as a challenge we presented to the men. We told them we could make better soap than they do. Canaan Fair Trade supplied us with the oil and the



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raw material we needed to make it and we immediately started working.” With a mixed sense of pride and humor, Maha points to the Maftoul she just put out to dry in the sun and says, “and did you know, for the first time the men admitted that we beat them! We made better soap!”

Indeed, the process of making this skin-soothing soap requires precision to balance the right amounts of olive and coconut oils but according to Maha it also requires the right spirit. “It is important to have fun while you are making something as gentle as artisan soap because it is a creative process. Working together in a team makes soap making season, which is between the months of January and February, a great time for creative and collaborate efforts. We spend most of our time laughing and while we are cooking the soap we are also cooking up new ideas.”

## AMBASSADORS FOR THE PEOPLE

While including coconut oil is something new in the history of soap making in Palestine, Maha says that discovering new natural products that can enhance our traditional goods is one of the essential benefits of working with Canaan Fair Trade. “Canaan Fair Trade opens new horizons for us. We have the traditional know-how and Canaan has access to places and people we would have never met before. A company in Germany would have never known about what we do if Canaan did not bring them to visit us and learn about what we do. In this way we are not just producers we are ambassadors for our village and we can express ourselves in our own way and not in a way that is imposed on us.”



*Maha checking on the sun-dried Maftoul.*

Like most members of the coop, enjoying the work and the companionship of other women is one of the grand joys she feels from her participation. But the greatest of these joys is the peace of mind she feels when “I come home from work and my kids have been waiting for me all day and I am able to offer something.”



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