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The Role of the Olive Co-operative in Enhancing Farmers' Income and Olive Production in Salamieh, Syria

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Abstract

Olive has become a major crop during the last few decades in Syria and is the main source of income for a large number of small and medium farmers. Most olive orchards are grown under dry farming in marginal lands, unsuitable for other crops. Statistics show that 60 % of the area under trees is olive (90 % of olive production is milled), and more than 377 000 families work in this field. This rapid expansion of olive plantations and approximately 50 % increase olive tree plantation in Salamieh area in the middle of Syria in the last decade led the olive farmers to establish an the first ever Olive Co-operative by a group of olive farmers in Salamieh district, Syria in 2006. This paper aims to study the case of this olive co-operative, a non governmental co-operative and a non-profit organisation, established with the assistance of the Aga Khan Foundation. This co-operative aims to train the farmers on pruning, grafting, IPM, modern irrigation methods, harvesting, etc. through workshops organising and to help them in improving harvesting, delivery time and processing procedures, cooperative-milling of olive, marketing their production in addition to encouraging the secondary industries of the olive such soap and bottling of oil. The establishment of this cooperative and its technical assistance did lead to premium quality extra virgin olive oil, acquiring premium of 6 % over prevailing market prices as a consequent for the high quality and it is a good example of cooperation between farmers. In addition the harvesting cost was reduced by 20 % in 2006. This can be used a model for agriculture extension and the establishment of such cooperatives should be encouraged to help value addition and increase farmers income through better harvesting, milling and marketing through cooperative behaviour.

Keywords: Income, marketing, olive co-operative, olive oil, Syria