



SUCCESS STORY

Southern Lebanese Farmers Find Common Ground



OTI/Lebanon

Shamam Al Nasser (left) and Abdallah Ali Obeid exchange olive-farming experiences and techniques after an SRF workshop in southern Lebanon.

“Personal stories are helping the group. When advice comes from a peer, it is easier to accept. I’ve witnessed behavior changes and seen farmers accepting alternative ways of working.”

—Tony Zalzal, agricultural engineer and SRF trainer

Program Manager:
Jennifer Boggs Serfass
E-mail: OTILebanon@usaid.gov
Tel: (202) 712-1004
Web: www.usaid.gov (keyword: OTI)

June 2008 – Lebanese farmers from seven villages in the deep south shared stories of their agricultural successes and challenges in a series of workshops designed to improve cross-confessional cooperation in the segregated region.

Led by the Scientific Research Foundation (SRF), a local non-governmental organization, the inter-village workshops focused on better agricultural practices in an area largely dependent on olive farming. However, SRF President Ziad Akl says he is witnessing impacts that extend far beyond the farmers’ fields.

Farmers who have traditionally not interacted are discovering the value of their neighbors’ knowledge in spite of political and religious differences, explained Akl, who stressed the importance of inter-village links to local economic stability and development. “These farmers have many things in common that they can share and learn from each other,” he said.

“I’ve come from Marwaheen with the hope to hear from others,” said Abdallah Ali Obeid, who related personal farming stories during a recent workshop. “I have taken a lot of experience from other farmers through stories of their successes and I now know some things to avoid though their mistakes.”

Echoing Obeid’s sentiments, Shamam Al Nasser from the neighboring village of Bustan said that bringing farmers together was an innovative way to enhance agricultural productivity and address the acute needs of an area that is still recovering from the damages inflicted during the 2006 war.

In addition to the OTI-funded workshop series, farmers will have free access to a new bottling factory built with support from the World Bank and the Lebanese government. Based in the Christian village of Alma Chaab, which is in an area where Shia, Sunni, and Christian villages cohabit but members of the different groups rarely interact, the factory will demonstrate the economic benefits of bottling olive oil – rather than selling in bulk – to farmers from the entire region.

Opportunities to boost incomes will provide incentives for farmers from differing backgrounds to come together at the factory and continue to build on the collaborative spirit fostered by the SRF activity.