

PRODUCER PROFILES

Deir Istya North Salfit cooperative

Riziq Abu Nasser is a father of three, and an olive farmer from the village of Deir Istya, in the Salfit district of the Palestinian West Bank. Riziq currently has 90 olive trees. Some of those inherited from his father are "Roman trees"; 2000 years old with a girth of 3 meters, some he planted himself in 1986 and he has plans to plant more.

Deir Istya is a beautiful hilltop village of around 4000 inhabitants with an ancient history – many of its families have lived there for hundreds of years. The village boasts an ancient fort and there are many stories about its origin.

In 2008, over 70% of the village was unemployed despite having a high proportion of well qualified inhabitants - at least 70 villagers hold Doctorates. There are active women's groups, which have obtained funding for a new kindergarten and for renovation of old buildings into a children's computing centre. Olive oil production is economically vital to the village - there are three oil presses and two marble processing plants. Deir Istya's olive cooperative was one of the first to gain Fairtrade and organic certification for its olive oil production.

The village once had a total of around 34,000 dunums, before losing about 20,000 dunums to a ring of illegal Israeli settlements and the separation wall. Included in the lands is the fertile valley of Wadi Qana. Blessed with many water springs and the Wadi Qana river, it has been a source of pride to the villagers who have long grazed their animals and cultivated many crops here, as well as gathering wild herbs. All of the springs have local names, including Ein al Maghassel, "the source of the washing place," where women came during Ottoman times to wash clothes and carpets.

Until recently some families lived next to their farms here, yet a few years ago access to their lands was prevented by the Israeli military and life became intolerable – the families moved up the hill into Deir Istya village. The clear water has also been polluted by raw sewage that is pumped out from the nearby illegal settlements – Immanuel and Revava. This is despite the Israeli nomination of the valley as a Nature Reserve!



Riziq Abu Nasser



THE FACTS

Location: **Deir Istya,**
part of North Salfit
cooperative, Palestine

Established: **2004**

North Salfit cooperative
members: **80**

Farm size:
800 dunums

Deir Istya
members: **28**

Deir Istya farm:
300 dunums



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Riziq visited Devon during Zaytoun's Fairtrade Fortnight tour in 2009, heralding the start of a new twinning project. The Olives for Hope project supports Devonians to sponsor the planting of new olive saplings around Deir Istya, to buy Fairtrade Palestinian oil as well as visiting the village during the annual olive harvest.

Riziq says *"The people of Deir Istya face a long list of problems, including the destruction of our olive groves. I hope that this project will enable the farmers of Deir Istya to increase their production, improve the use of what remains of their land, and strengthen the bonds of friendship between the people of Britain and Palestine."*

Recently, however, there have been more challenges for the Deir Istya farmers. In the early morning hours on September 24, 2010, Israeli settlers ploughed up over 40 dunums of Deir Istya lands and spread 20 caravans there. These are to be included in the colony total area. Still, late in 2010 some of the farmers began again to plant new olive trees and to clean up their water resources. Yet in November they found on arrival at the site, that their way was blocked by the Israeli army, who had destroyed the new plantation and blocked the springs, as well as confiscating over 50m of irrigation pipes and agricultural equipment.

Still, despite losing some of his own trees – these were grubbed out to build a new road serving an Israeli settlement, Riziq remains optimistic about the opportunities that Fairtrade offers his community

"The process of marketing olive oil through Fairtrade has made me optimistic. In Palestine farmers have complicated problems. But, with Fairtrade, I feel that, as a farmer, there is a solution for every problem that we have," he said.

Formerly his community sold olive oil to Gaza and to the Gulf States, although the price then did not even cover the cost of production. Access to these markets was closed in the 1990s.

Through Fairtrade new markets in Europe have opened demanding organic oil of high quality. There has been investment in new equipment (stainless steel containers instead of recycled jerry cans) and during harvest season each day's pickings are taken to the oil press to be cleaned and milled. The better price benefits local farmers who feel that their produce and labour is respected by those who buy it, and the social premium for the community is used for the health clinic and his children's school. There are hopes to buy a shared tractor.

We'll leave the last word to Riziq:

"By buying our olive oil, you are saving our lives, the future of our children and you are helping to save our land."



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