

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES AND VULNERABLE JORDANIANS IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

The AFD-funded Grow Economy project, led by a consortium of actors including Acted, Action Against Hunger (ACF), Terre des hommes (TDH), Phenix Centre for Sustainable Development, ECO Consult, The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN), and National Agricultural Research Center (NARC) aims to promote sustainable and inclusive economic opportunities for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians in the agriculture sector. The project targets vulnerable small farmers and agricultural labourers aiming to improve their livelihoods and working conditions while promoting gender inclusion.

SELECTION OF MEDIUM & LARGE FARMS

Under the Grow Economy project, eight medium to large farms were selected through ECO Consult's network. The farms were chosen based on their commitment to improve working conditions and the capacity of agricultural workers, strengthen roles for women within the agricultural sector, and their existing practices or commitment to adopt agroecological approaches within their farms. Additionally, the farms demonstrated interest in supporting the integration and market linkage of small farmers, particularly within the project's selected value chains: strawberry, baby cucumber, bell pepper, okra, and eggplant. One of the key project's objectives is to link small farmers to these medium and large farms, which play a critical role in the value chain, to facilitate small farmers' access to advanced technology, post-harvest facilities, and improved marketing opportunities for their produce. To support this, the large farms will receive grants to invest in post-harvest facilities, further strengthening their role in enhancing value chain efficiency. Additional selection and eligibility criteria included the commitment to providing equal opportunities, and willingness to host trainings and use their farms as learning fields. Contractual requirements for engaging with small farmers were also established. Finally, adherence to child labour laws and protection was carefully considered, making it a key eligibility criterion that no children under the age of 16 are employed on the farms.



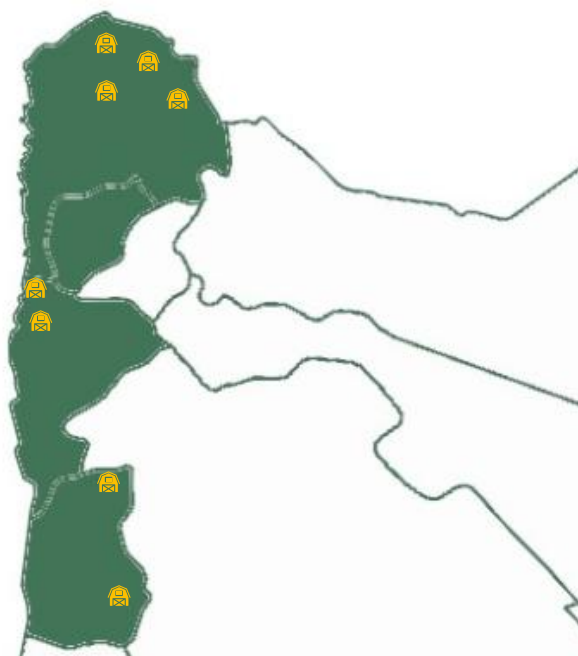
8 medium/large farms have been selected



Locations: Irbid, Madaba and Balqa Governorates



Target Beneficiaries: Small farmers (integration), agricultural labourers (improved working conditions), and medium/large farms (capacity strengthening & value chain integration).



KEY FARM CHARACTERISTICS

Market access and engagement

The eight selected farms primarily target sales points within their governorates, focusing on local markets such as farm gate sales, hypermarkets, and central markets. While the okra farms do not target markets outside their governorates, the other farms do. Notably, the two bell pepper farms and the strawberry farm engage in international sales, with all of them exporting to regional and international markets through trade fairs and established buyer networks. All farms have undertaken initiatives to expand their market presence and connect with wider audiences. These efforts include hosting farm tours and events to showcase their produce and practices, participating in trade shows and exhibitions, and engaging in local bazaars to increase visibility. Additionally, the two bell pepper farms and the strawberry farm have attended international trade fairs to try and establish connections with buyers and stakeholders abroad. Some farms have also adopted tailored strategies, such as offering home delivery services (the Okra farms) and exploring other innovative marketing approaches.



Bell Pepper Farm - Balqa

Post-harvest Activities

All selected medium and large farms engage in basic post-harvesting activities, which typically involve manual sorting and grading in designated areas on the farm, such as temporary tents, this is common on the okra and eggplant farms. However, advanced post-harvesting systems, where sorting and grading take place in a designated facility with equipment such as cold storage, are largely absent. Instead, most farms rely on partnerships with specialised companies for advanced post-harvest activities. While all farms report having the space to set up more advanced systems, only the strawberry farm in Madaba and one of the bell pepper farms in Balqa currently have equipment for post-harvest activities, including cold storage and processing. Additionally, only three farms mentioned that neighboring farmers currently bring their produce to them for post-harvesting. However, all eight farms have indicated a strong willingness to invest in new post-harvest technologies or systems to improve the efficiency of their operations and are open to supporting small farmers by incorporating their products into their facilities.



Nearly all farms follow **packaging guidelines and standards**, varying by crop and market. Common materials: plastic, polystyrene, cardboard boxes, mesh or vacuum-sealed bags. While most farms rely on specialised companies for packaging the project will provide training on product handling.



To **stand out in a competitive market**, farms ensure products meet crop and market-specific quality standards through proper sizing, taste, branding, and packaging. Some differentiate with Global GAP or Safe Product certifications.



Effective inventory management and proper ventilation help farms minimise **post-harvest losses and preserve crop freshness and value**, only the strawberry farm has access to rapid cooling systems.



Most farms **maintain soil health and fertility** through minimal tillage, soil amendments (sulfur, gypsum, organic fertilizers), regular testing (pH, nutrients, organic content), and crop rotation.

SELECTED FARMS PER TARGET CROP

Okra

Okra is a widely cultivated crop in Irbid and plays a vital role in both local and national agricultural economies. It adapts well to the local climatic and soil conditions and has high market demand. Potential improvements that small and large farms can benefit from, include adopting rainwater harvesting, enhancing pest and disease management practices, developing post-harvest techniques, and introducing value-added products through food processing such as drying and pickling. Expanding markets and promoting ecological balance are additional opportunities. Okra business models focus on developing new products, establishing cooperatives for better market access and bargaining power, creating sorting, grading, and packaging facilities, and minimizing post-harvest losses through improved storage solutions.



Okra farms in northern Jordan employ less labourers due to their smaller size, rainfed cultivation, and less advanced farming practices.



The average yield at the selected Okra farms is 0.6 ton per dunum.

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- **30 dunum Okra farm**, Qasabeh, Irbid.
- Leased by a **Syrian male farmer**.
- **11 workers**: Mostly Syrian, equal gender balance.

2

- **32 dunum Okra farm**, Bani Kenanah, Irbid.
- Leased by a **Syrian male farmer**.
- **9 workers**: 4 daily Syrians, 5 permanent Egyptians, equal gender balance.



Okra Farm – Bani Kenanah

3

- **100 dunum Eggplant farm**, Ramtha, Irbid.
- Owned by a **Jordanian male farmer**.
- **38 workers**: 10 permanent Jordanians, 28 temporary Jordanian & Pakistani, mostly women.

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- **150-180 dunum Eggplant farm**, Ramtha, Irbid
- Leased by a **Syrian male farmer**.
- **100 workers**: 30 permanent Syrians, 50 temporary Jordanians, equal gender split.

Eggplant

Ramtha's favorable climate and fertile soils provide an ideal environment for eggplant cultivation, which has high market demand. Potential interventions involve improving soil health, enhancing water efficiency, and integrating pest management strategies to reduce environmental impact and align with global sustainability trends. Supporting farmers with modern agricultural techniques can further enhance productivity and quality. Business opportunities include food processing, new marketing channels and international trade fairs, enhancing resource efficiency, and establishing direct supply contracts with retailers.



The average yield at the selected eggplant farms is 8 ton per dunum.



Bell Pepper Farm - Balqa

Coloured Bell Pepper

In Balqa and Deir Alla, coloured bell peppers have high demand in local and regional markets and strong export potential. Enhancing greenhouse management, improving pest and disease control, and establishing value-added processing (e.g., drying and pickling) are key areas for improvement among the small, medium and large farms. Potential business models should focus on linkages between small and large farms to improve post-harvest practices, incorporating pre-cooling facilities, and potentially forming cooperatives by connecting with external companies such as Jordanian-Palestinian Company for Marketing Agricultural JAPCO.



Both farms have Global GAP certifications and Safe Product.



The average yield at the selected colored bell pepper farms is seven ton per dunum.



These bell pepper farms distinguish themselves through sophisticated market engagement, including international exports and proactive participation in trade shows and fairs to expand their market presence.

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- **117.5 dunum colored bell pepper farm**, Deir Alla, Balqa.
- Owned by a **Jordanian male farmer**.
- **70 workers**: 9 permanent, 61 temporary. 9 Egyptians, 12 Syrians, and 49 Jordanians. Of the total, 61 are women and 9 are men.

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- **300 dunum colored bell pepper farm**, Deir Alla, Balqa.
- Owned by a **Jordanian male farmer**.
- **80 workers**: 50 permanent Egyptian men, 30 temporary Jordanian women.

Strawberry

Strawberries are a high-value crop with significant export potential, and they are an excellent contributor to diversifying farmers' incomes in Madaba. Potential room for improvement includes enhancing post-harvest handling to minimise losses, providing training on cultivation management, and expanding market access for small-scale farmers. Within Jordan's strawberry value chain, several large-scale farms are present, including the farm selected for this project (detailed below). Creating strong linkages between this large farm and small strawberry farmers in the region would enhance their market reach.

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- **127 dunum and 256 green houses Strawberry farm**.
- Owned by a **Jordanian male farmer**.
- **70 workers**: around 55 Syrians, both men and women, and 15 Egyptians men.



The selected strawberry farm is one of the more advanced when it comes to post-harvesting activities, having their own branding, packaging, and grading equipment on-site, along with cold storage and processing systems.



The average yield at the selected strawberry farm is 7 ton per layered green house and 4 ton per traditional green house.



Strawberry Farm - Madaba

Baby Cucumber

In Madaba, cucumber and baby cucumber cultivation represents a significant opportunity for agricultural sector development. As a widely grown crop that serves essential local market demands, cucumbers offer the advantage of year-round production when grown in protected systems. Several key interventions can enhance this sector's potential: modernizing greenhouse technologies to boost yields, implementing more efficient water management systems, and developing processing capabilities for pickled gherkins targeting export markets. The presence of established large-scale farms in the region provides a strong foundation for business development. Potential business models include establishing direct supply contracts with retailers and expanding food processing operations, particularly focusing on pickled cucumber production for international markets. This integrated approach would strengthen both domestic supply chains and export opportunities.

8

- **40-dunum cucumber farm in Qasabeh, Madaba**
- **Managed by a Jordanian female farmer.**
- **18 workers:** 3 permanent staff (2 Jordanian men, 1 Egyptian man) and 15 temporary staff (6 Syrian women, 4 Jordanian women, 4 Syrian men, 1 Jordanian man).



The average yield at the selected cucumber farm is 8-10 ton per dunum.



While the selected cucumber farm currently lacks post-harvest equipment, it has both available space for materials and willingness to invest in this infrastructure.

While each farm has different characteristics and agricultural practices, they all share several features and approaches. All farms report being consulted by other farmers on agricultural activities and frequently provide advice to their fellow farmers. Many of these farms also participate in community and farmers markets and they support other local farmers through educational workshops, mentorship programs, and resource sharing. All 8 farms are centrally located, offering easy access for small-scale farmers.



Eggplant Farm - Ramtha

NEXT STEPS

The capacity of eight medium and large farms will be strengthened to support value chain integration to the benefit of the small farmers and improve working conditions to the benefit of the labourers. To support the integration process and to facilitate access of small and vulnerable farmers to post-harvest infrastructure, **Acted and ACF will provide business grants** of up to 15,000 JOD to the eight selected medium and large farms. The grants will be based on the development of business plans that demonstrate a plan for the investment, cost-share, how small farmers will benefit from the infrastructure and the improvement of working conditions for labourers, particularly women.