

Agrexco: harvesting the fruits of the occupation

Colonising Palestine

Nearly 60 years have passed since the Israeli occupation successfully stole the Palestinian name "Jaffa", along with the city, for the economic and policy interests it provides. Today the "Israeli" name - a colonial brand that continues to thrive in the 21st century - is marketed in supermarkets worldwide by Agrexco. The apartheid regime's largest food stuff distributor reaps the profits of the produce from stolen Palestinian land and labor.

Since the 1948 expulsion and takeover of Palestinian lands, agricultural colonization of Palestinian fields and marketing of its produce has been the spearhead of Israeli expansionism. The establishment of agricultural settlements in the 1967 occupied areas, the annexation of the lands of nearly 300 villages for the Apartheid Wall, the suffocating closure of Gaza as produce rots away at sealed "crossings", are all part of a long-standing Israeli policy to take over Palestinian land and exploit Palestinian labour and heritage. Though agricultural production today has lost much ground in Israeli economy to military and hi-tech sectors, its symbolism is fundamental to explain the colonial and expansionist nature of Apartheid Israel.

The villager of Al-Hadidiya, bulldozed in August 2007 to make way for Agrexco's suppliers in the illegal Israeli settlement of Ro'i



The business of occupation

Agrexco today is responsible for the export of 60-70 percent of all settlement produce, making it an important economic driver for the ongoing land grab in Palestine. It is 50% owned by the Israeli state. In a reciprocal arrangement, the Occupation supports Agrexco's activities by supporting the establishment of the illegal settlements in the West Bank and applying discriminatory trade regimes, and shares in the resulting profits. The estab-

For this reason, it has been the focus of protests and boycotts for a number of years. Agrexco has a number of trading names, including Carmel, Coral and Jaffa. In 2007, Agrexco's business has continued to boom on the profits of harvests from the illegal settlements. Agrexco anticipates exporting about 2,700 tonnes of dates during 2007 - return from sales is expected to total \$14 million, a 20% increase on 2006.

and settlers receive a 75 percent discount on electricity and transportation. Water for irrigation, confiscated from Palestinian farmers, is provided for free. Though the expected flow of settlers has not yet happened, the expulsion of the Palestinian population was intensified.

A new project is now to supersede the 2005 proposal. Shimon Peres' "Peace Corridor" is to seal the annexation of the Jordan

Valley, ensure normalization with Jordan and create a hazardous mega water project transporting water from the Red Sea to the shrinking Dead Sea to allow the Occupation to continue to exploit the Palestinian water resources of the Jordan river. One of the main pillars of the project is the expansion of the agricultural business. Pre-seasonal agricul-

In Frush Beit-Dajan, Jordan Valley, the Occupation bulldozers destroy a water tank belonging to Palestinian farmers



ture for export, an airport for agricultural produce to the north of the Dead Sea, and a center for agricultural exports to the Arab countries close to the Damiya Bridge in the Jordan Valley are to be created.

lishment of the settlements means the expulsion of Palestinians and the annexation of Palestinian land.

Agrexco is an integral part of the Occupation. By allowing the import of Agrexco products, governments worldwide are in direct conflict with the opinion of the International Court of Justice that they must not support the Occupation's programme of illegal settlement, which is illegal under the

Reaping the rewards

Agrexco is reaping the fruits of the Occupation's settlement programme. In 2005, the Occupation's Ministry of Agriculture started a multi-million dollar program, aimed at doubling the number of settlers in the Jordan Valley, through the construction of new illegal settlements, and the issue of grants to settler farms. Settlers receive benefits and incentives including long-term loans of up to \$20,000. Houses can be bought cheaply,

The project, which will include Israeli and Jordanian business based on Palestinian land and labor, will add new markets and commercial routes to companies to the existing settlement agrobusiness, benefiting companies such as Agrexco.

Occupation forces drive Palestinians from Al-Hadidiya and Humza to make way for Agrexco's suppliers

Carmel Agrexco are supplied by settlements all over the West Bank. One such settlement is Ro'i in the Jordan Valley. During August 2007, at the request of Ro'i settlement, the nearby Palestinian Bedouin villages of Al-Hadidiya and Humza were bulldozed by the Occupation. During 2006, the settlers petitioned the Occupation's Court to enact a demolition order against the villages, claiming that the Bedouin community, who have grazed their animals around the area for generations, were a 'threat' to Ro'i. On 13 August, the set-

Al-Hadidiya was attacked on 13 August and again on 23 August, destroying homes and a number of animal enclosures. The villagers started rebuilding within a matter of hours. They remain defiant. Salah Abdullah Hussein Bisharat said:

"Will never leave this village, even if we have to live under its stones. This is our land, and we will not leave."

Seventeen Bedouin families, numbering around 180 people face eviction by force.

Even before the demolition order, the Occupation applied pressure on the villagers to leave the area by demolishing tradi-

tional wells and rebuilding them surrounded by fences, barring them from Palestinians. The farmers of Al-Hadidiya and Humza were forced to rely on water transported from Al-Fare'a, 35 km away, until the Occupation started confiscating their water tanks, as happened on 29 July 2007.

After the removal of Al-Hadidiya, the settlers are apparently planning to use Al-Hadidiya and Humza for the expansion of their agricultural business, which includes supply of products to Agrexco for export.

Carmel Agrexco has suppliers all over the Jordan Valley and the story of Hadidiya is typical. After

the 1994 Oslo Accords, just 135 km² was left under Palestinian administrative control: 6% of the land. On the remaining 94% (2265 km²) completely controlled by the Occupation, there are 36 illegal Israeli settlements occupying 1200 km²; and 1065 km² of 'closed zones' covering the 'border line', military bases and natural reserves.

Carmel Agrexco's profits are built on the expulsion of the Palestinian people from their homes.

"Will never leave this village, even if we have to live under its stones. This is our land, and we will not leave."



Above: This child now has no home.

Left: Homes in al-Hadidiya are utterly destroyed by the Occupation bulldozers.



Agrexco forces Gazan farmers into dependency

Since the occupation of Gaza, farmers in the strip have been gradually forced into dependency on Agrexco and later on other Israeli exporters.

Until recently, there have been 10,000 Palestinian growers working in Palestinian fields in Gaza and further thousands in greenhouse cultivations. Gazan farmers produce strawberries, courgettes, tomatoes, cucumbers and many other agricultural goods. Most production from the greenhouses will be sold to the European market. 30 years ago, the Occupation forced a contract on Palestinian producers awarding a monopoly on agricultural exports from Gaza to Agrexco, imposing a stranglehold on their ability to sell and export their crops. After the neoliberal reforms of Israeli apartheid economy, other exporters have entered the market, yet

complete dependency of Palestinian farmers on Israeli exporting companies and Agrexco's market dominance has remained unaltered. The prices and products are dictated by the Occupation and even the procurement of seeds is possible only via two Israeli companies licensed by the Occupation.

The Occupation Ministry of Agriculture forces the Palestinian farmers to undergo expensive Israeli testing procedures before any kind of export is possible. Produce has to be put in small plastic boxes, indicating the place of production and the weight of the box before and after packaging. In order to pass the commercial terminals it has to be repackaged and analyzed twice. All these procedures raise the production costs enormously, yet the Occupation monopoly company

places the weight of all these expenses on the farmers.

With the complete isolation of the Strip from the rest of the world, Gaza farmers are now facing financial ruin. Since the economic blockade, farmers have been unable to export their produce and to replace vital equipment such as plastic irrigation pipes, because of shortages and high prices.

Just in time, Agrexco has developed a system to continue to reap the profits from the Occupation and to avoid its own label to be affected by the unreliability of Gaza produce created by the siege. Until recently, Palestinian farmers were obliged to label crops as Israeli products under the label Carmel in order to be able to export them through the Occupation monopoly. Since

2003, Agrexco has created a "Palestinian" label Coral under which it markets the products from Gaza. Under the cover of "concessions to Palestinian aspirations" the Occupation has simply ensured it will not get the backlash of the damage it produces on Palestinian economy and livelihoods.

The Agrexco monopoly and the Occupation's blockade are cooperating to crush the life out of Gazan farmers.

Farmers harvesting strawberries in Gaza



Case study: Action against Agrexco

Agrexco has been the target of protests and blockades over the last few years. After five blockades of the company headquarters in the UK, campaigners have reached a surprising situation paralyzing the company in front of the protests.

In Feb 2005, 7 blockaders won an important case at Uxbridge Magistrates Court, during which Agrexco UK manager Amos Or was cross-examined over Agrexco's complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories for several hours. The company have since refused to cooperate with police seeking to prosecute protesters who have shut down the factory on four subsequent occasions, despite obvious disruption to their business. Agrexco have been anxious in press statements to deny any disruption from the blockades, even though in the first blockade court case they claimed to have lost £100,000 in business.

The company may be afraid that any new court hearing would force them to disclose more in-

formation about their complicity in crimes under international humanitarian law committed by Israel. In the 2005 case Amos Or admitted under oath that the UK company, which is 50% Israeli state owned, imports 70% of the produce from West Bank settlements which have been ruled illegal under international law by the International Court of Justice.

As one activist put it: 'Agrexco UK are now exposed to the possibility of a permanent blockade of their business, that the police will be unable to remove unless the company are prepared to give evidence against protesters in court under aggravated trespass laws. [...] If Agrexco do this the illegal nature of their operations, complicit in war crimes and crimes against humanity in the

occupied territories will be exposed. Whatever they do they can't win. The war criminals are cornered. Now is the time to peacefully blockade them without fear or arrest.'

Though Europe absorbs 80% of Agrexco marketed goods, the company holds branches in London, Frankfurt, Madrid, Milan, Paris, Rotterdam, Vienna, Zurich and New York, as well as agents in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and the Far East. Activists all over these regions can organize blockades and boycotts of the Occupation's main agricultural exporter. Send your news and photos to Stop the Wall!

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The Carmel-Agrexco depot blockaded in the UK



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