

Upper Galilee Regional Council – Advanced Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture

The Upper Galilee Regional Council is located in the northern part of the state of Israel, in the region known as the Galilee Panhandle, or the Upper Galilee. The council's area includes the valley of the Jordan River known as the Hula Valley, through which 50% of all the surface water of the state of Israel flows, and the Upper Galilee mountains, the highest group of mountains in the country. The area of the council also includes nature reserves, many rare natural sites, numerous historical and archeological sites from the Chalcolithic era to modern times. The region hosts over 2 million visitors annually, who come to enjoy its unique natural treasures.

The area of the Upper Galilee Regional Council spreads over approximately 320 square kilometers, and it contains other agricultural and municipal government authorities, as well.

Agriculture is the core of the council's open areas; it is intensive, highly advanced agriculture.

The agricultural activities cover approximately 90 km² of orchards and citrus groves and about 65 km² of field crops. In addition, farms in the areas raise dairy herds, grass-fed cattle, and poultry.

This is an area of high environmental sensitivity: it is the drainage basin for most of Israel's surface water used for drinking and agriculture, it possesses unique natural sites, and it is the leading area for tourism in the hot Israel summers. In light of these factors, we feel a strong sense of responsibility to preserve the existing nature sites and the environment and to protect the health of the residents and the many visitors.

Approximately nine years ago, we introduced a new model for environmentally sustainable agriculture in the region, based not on top-down regulation, but instead on creating information bases, supervision, and accessible support for farmers, to enable their proper management of policies to control pests, disease, and weeds. The program also includes joint management of the purchase and use of low-toxin pesticides. We have created a

model for coexistence pacts between communities and farmers. It has been remarkably successful, drawing participation by farmers that previously used harsh and dangerous toxins indiscriminately and irresponsibly, endangering both human life and the environment.

The Upper Galilee Regional Council is interested in further developing this model for the entire process, across all the agricultural authorities in the area. We aim to create a critical mass of farmers who will lead the entire area into a new era, encompassing numerous fields of agriculture and generating significant change in all aspects of agriculture in the region. The idea is to achieve this without imposing regulations that could burden the farmers and create anti-establishment sentiment among them.

The Upper Galilee Regional Council has successfully completed three projects with the support of the European Union and the Mediterranean States – in the field of management of animal waste interfaces in the potable water drainage basin of the state of Israel (LIFE – SHEZARIM 1997), management of a system of humans and nature in the streams of the Jordan River (LIFE Human & Nature 2006), and in municipal treatment of organic waste in a rural and tourism area – a partnership of 8 organizations in the Mediterranean region (ENPI-MED SCOW 2013).

The Upper Galilee Regional Council is interested in joining with other organizations, companies, and authorities in the European Union that share a similar agenda in the field of agriculture, in order to submit a joint project to the LIFE Foundation (September 2016), for the purpose of promoting an overall policy of environmentally sustainable agriculture that uses less toxins.

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