

Majd El Meouch Food Plan





Majd El Meouch Food Plan

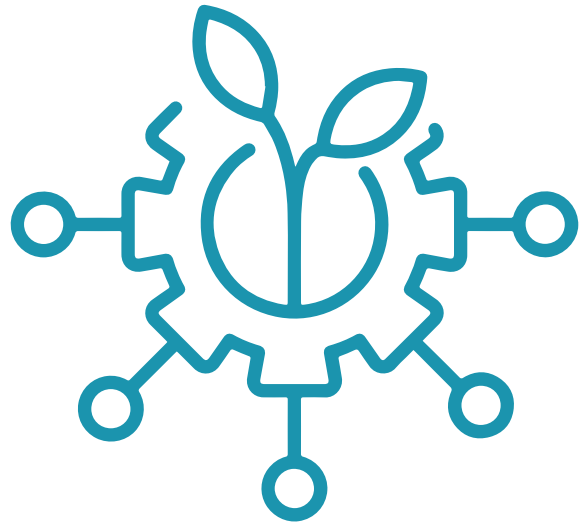
By Majd El Meouch local committee
with the support of Zeina Fahed,
Angela Saade, Corinne Jabbour
and Yara Ward from Jibal.

2023 - 2024

Table of Contents

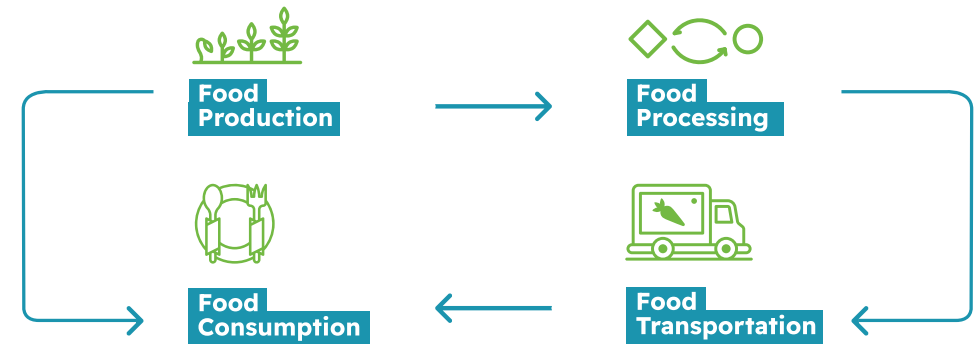
1 . The Food System	06
.....	
2 . What is a Territorial Food Plan	10
.....	
3 . About Majd El Meouch	13
.....	
4 . Methodology	16
.....	
5. Action Plan/Recommendations	20

1.



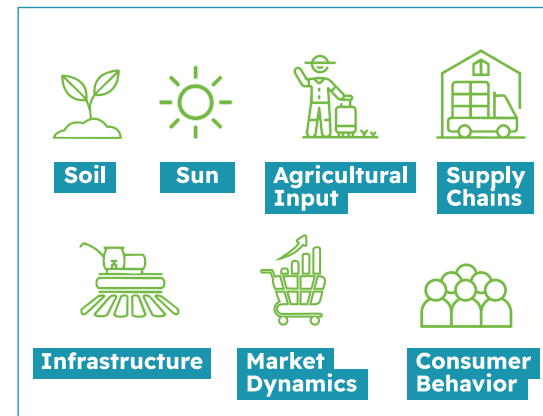
The Food System

A food system comprises a complex web of activities and elements involving the production, processing, transport, and consumption of food.



FOOD SYSTEM

These include elements of nature such as sun and soil, agricultural inputs, supply chains, infrastructure, market dynamics, and consumer behavior, all of which contribute to the availability, accessibility, and quality of the food we consume¹.



Availability
Accessibility
and Quality
of Food

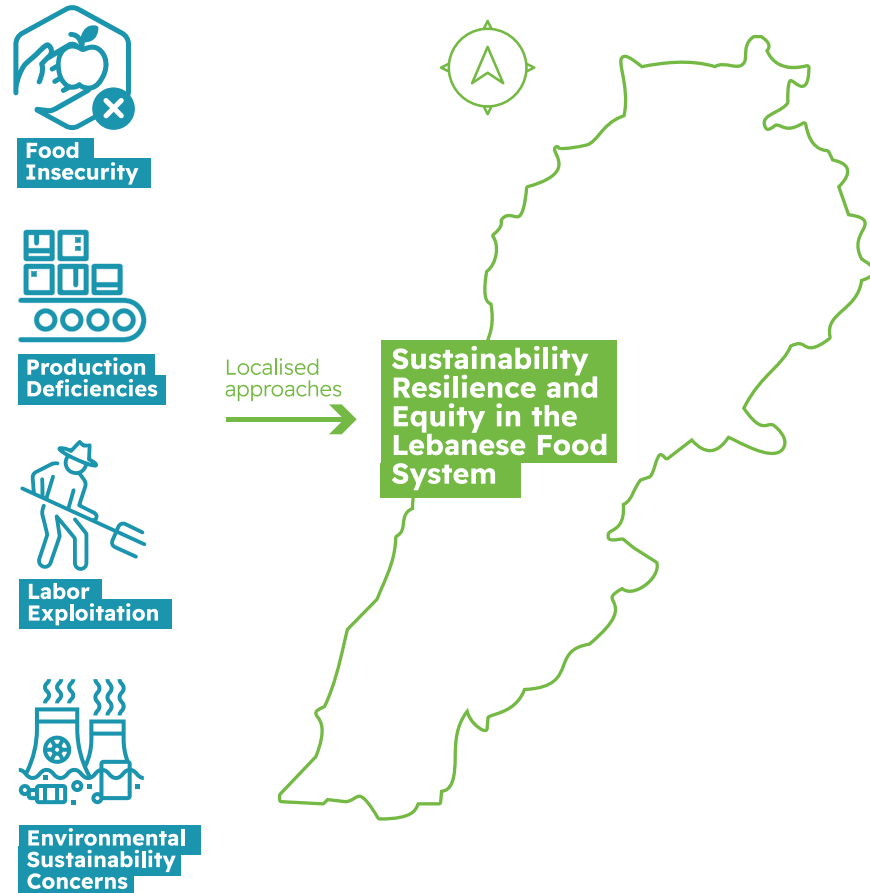


¹ National Food Strategy. 2019. "National Food Strategy - Independent Review." National Food Strategy. 2019. <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/>.

There is a growing recognition that contemporary food systems are falling short in their ability to ensure the provision of high-quality, nutritious, and affordable diets that are accessible to all segments of society². While food system issues take place at various scales (global, national, local), this report is focused particularly on the case of Lebanon.

The food system in Lebanon is confronted with a myriad of challenges, impeding its capacity to effectively address local needs within a functional and optimized structure.

Despite the economic collapse of 2019 exacerbating these challenges, it is evident that Lebanon’s food system issues are complex and interconnected, spanning from food insecurity to production deficiencies, labor exploitation, and environmental sustainability concerns.



² United Nations Capital Development Fund (UN-CDF), “Territorial Food Systems for Sustainable Development.” Issue Brief for UN Food Systems Summit, 2021.



Achieving sustainability, resilience, and equity in the Lebanese food system requires collaborative efforts from various stakeholders. However, the absence of comprehensive implementation of national policies, such as the national agriculture strategy 2020-2025, further complicates the situation. Consequently, localized approaches emerge as the most suitable strategy for addressing Lebanon’s unique challenges.

This report will provide an overview of Jibal’s territorial approach for strengthening local food systems at the local level. It presents a case study of a territorial food plan developed for Majd El Meouch, a village in the Chouf district, where Jibal has been actively involved in projects supporting the local community of farmers for two years.

This case study delves into the utility and advantages of implementing a territorial food plan. Additionally, it outlines the methodologies employed to formulate well-informed recommendations and an action plan.





What is a Territorial Food Plan?

Territorial food planning aims to mobilize and unite different actors within a specific geographical area, with the goal of fostering a socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable food system that can withstand unforeseen shocks and challenges³.

This approach entails strategizing to optimize resource utilization, ensuring the active participation of various stakeholders, and establishing equitable systems of ownership and leadership at both local authority and community levels.



Territorial food systems have been identified as prime ways to improve public health and work towards more food justice⁴. A strong territorial food plan will identify realistic and feasible action points that build on and improve the existing system. It works with relevant local actors such as producers, distributors, cooperatives, and/or local authorities in order to develop shorter food value chains, agroecological production approaches, and other relevant actions that better address environmental and social needs of the area of work⁵.

A strong territorial food plan works with:



Producers



Distributors



Cooperatives



Local Authorities

³Radim Kuzel, Julien Lagier, Anna Leygues, Vincent Thénard, Isabelle Duvernoy, 2019. Territorial Food Strategies (The): Definition. Dictionary of Agroecology.

<https://dicoagroecologie.fr/en/dictionnaire/territorial-food-strategies-the/>

⁴URGENCEI. "Territorial Food Systems House." Accessed April 23, 2024.

<https://hub.urgenci.net/houses/territorialfoodsysteams-house/>

⁵ibid



A territorial food plan can be developed at different scales: village, city, unions, and region. Each scale requires tailored approaches to achieve desired results.

For example, when working at the level of an agricultural village, it might be most appropriate to focus more intentionally on production aspects of the food system such as setting up a localized agricultural input system or supporting cooperation between farmers. In other words, territorial food planning is flexible and adaptable to the place-based needs and particularities rather than an imposed vision.

A key component of Jibal's approach encourages action plans that are based on a common local vision which is informed by research and consultations with the local community. It also necessitates the support and leadership of local authorities. This can better ensure that the territorial food plan creates a coherent matrix of activities and elements at the local level that provide all relevant actors more autonomy over their production and consumption choices.

3.


About Majd El Meouch












Majd El Meouch is a small village of approximately 4000 inhabitants. It is located in the Chouf caza of Mount Lebanon governorate, roughly 44 km away from Beirut.

Majd El Meouch can be categorized as an agricultural village with several elevations (ranging from 300m to 1000m) which allow for a diversity of crops to be grown.

These include vegetables (e.g. leafy greens, gourds, cruciferous vegetables, root crops, beans), fruits (e.g. citrus, melon), and local staples like olives, grapes and thyme. There are approximately 100 farmers, including several who are involved in animal husbandry (poultry and cattle).



Main crops

 Leafy greens	 Gourds	 Cruciferous vegetables
 Root crops	 Beans	 Fruits
 Olives	 Grapes	 Thyme



Located in Chouf
Caza of Mount Lebanon Governate




4000
Inhabitants



44 KM
away from beirut

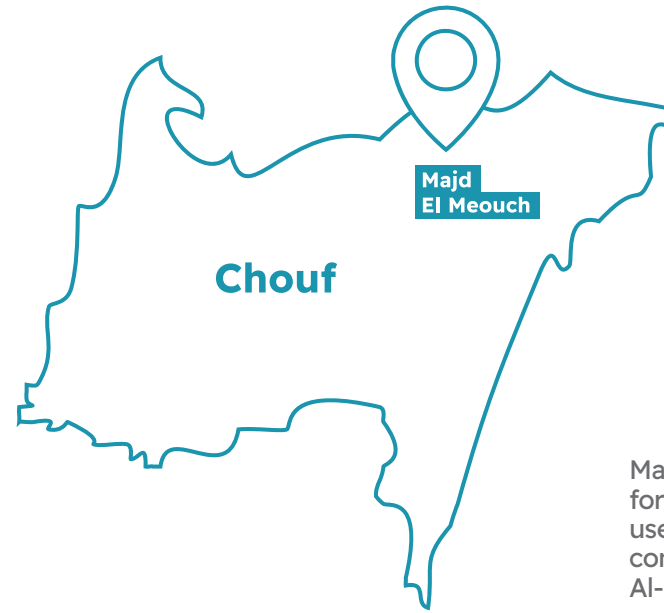
1000 M
Highest Elevation



300 M
Lowest Elevation in Majd El Meouch



100 Farmers
including several who are involved in animal husbandry (poultry and cattle).



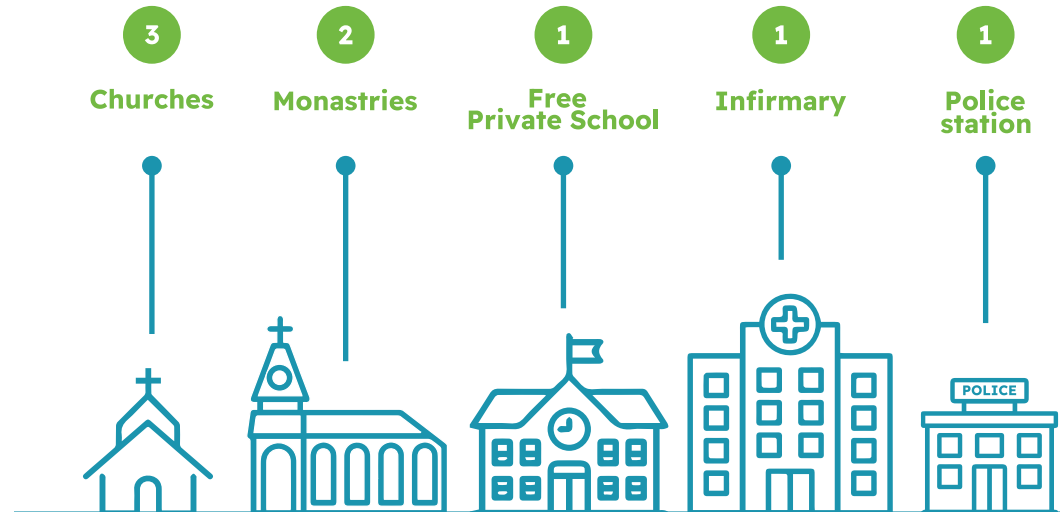


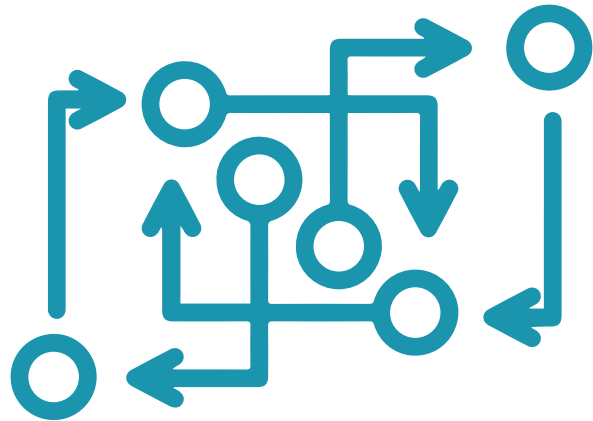
High Waters

Majd El Meouch is renowned for its high water - Al safa spring

Majd El Meouch is renowned for its high water quality used for irrigation, as it comes directly from the local Al-Safa spring.

There are three churches, two monasteries, a private free school, run by the Saint Maroun Monastery, one infirmary, and one police station. The monasteries play an important role in local community life and are potential avenues for the promotion of best practices.





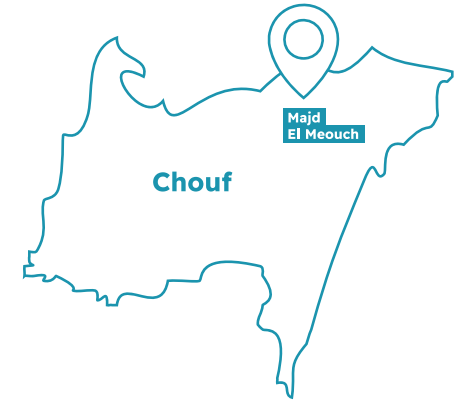
Methodology

The following methodology reflects the procedures and assessments designed to fulfill the development of a territorial food plan in Majd El Meouch, a village located in the Chouf.

Majd El Meouch was selected for a collaboration with Jibal for two key reasons.

First, there was an expressed interest in and support for a territorial food plan from the local municipality.

Second, Jibal possesses previous robust experiences supporting farmers in the village as well as the Chouf area at large.

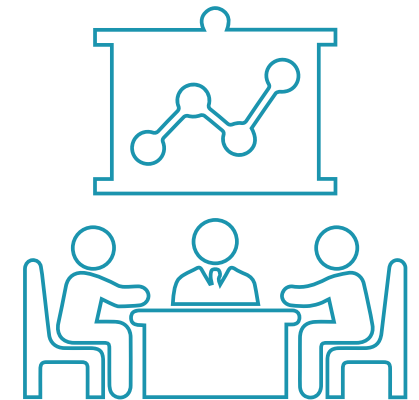


In the previous two years, Jibal worked with the village in order to devise a range of well-informed strategies aimed at training and coaching farmers to transition towards sustainable agricultural practices.

Jibal has also been instrumental in facilitating connections between farmers and alternative market channels.

These experiences ensured that a more robust understanding of farmers' and village needs could be incorporated into the current development of a territorial food plan.

Coupled with knowledge gathered from these past experiences, a series of assessments were conducted between May and June of 2023 in the village to develop the plan.



The work commenced with an introductory meeting between Jibal's team and a local committee consisting of the municipality's vice president, a municipality employee, the mokhtar (refers to a locally selected public notary and community leader), and a few farmers and local activists.

In this initial meeting, the local committee supported Jibal in identifying several other stakeholders in Majd El Meouch and surrounding villages that they saw should be involved. The municipality also granted the Jibal team permission to conduct assessments.

Identified stakeholders in addition to several other actors found relevant which included: grocery stores, Mouneh producers (small scale producers of traditional processed food goods), poultry and livestock farms as well as the local olive press, butcher, winery, and monastery.

After the assessments were completed, an organization of the data and analysis of findings were completed. These findings were then shared in internal discussions between the Jibal team in order to determine specific action points to be presented to the local committee.

A consultation was organized to collaboratively review action point suggestions with the local committee in order to integrate their feedback and further suggestions. This led to the fine-tuning of the initial action points in a manner that better aligned with the municipality's capacity and vision.

The Jibal team followed this step with another set of feasibility studies and consultations before holding a final meeting with the municipality where the final territorial food plan was agreed on.

This process was iterative, and allowed for further communication with the local committee.

For example, the local committee later requested a more focused feasibility study to be completed by Jibal on two action points most interesting for them: setting up a local compost unit and a local DIY organic pesticide unit.





Action Plan & Recommendations

The following section details the action plan and recommendations informed by Jibal's collaborative assessments and consultations with Majd El Meouch local authorities and community, summarized in the table below.

The action plan acts as a locally relevant reference for the Majd El Meouch municipality and is to be utilized by the local authorities' own accord. It can support the better consideration of food and farming issues in local planning and budgeting decisions as well as offer a strategic plan to follow when funds are present.

Action Plan & Recommendations

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | Produce Local Compost |
| 2. | Produce Local Bio-Inputs |
| 3. | Produce Seedlings in Local Nurseries |
| 4. | Establish an Agroecology Hub and partnership between monastery and the local agricultural cooperative |
| 5. | Diversify Local Crop Production |
| 6. | Introduce Nature-based activities at the local school |
| 7. | Utilize Territorial Food Plan as a strategic planning and networking document |
| 8. | Provide continuous support for the local agricultural cooperative |
| 9. | Organize annual local festivals and events |

1. Produce Local Compost

Approximately nine poultry farms generate manure in the village while there are approximately 100 farmers in need of manure compost.

The assessments indicate that poultry farm owners predominantly sell their manure to suppliers in the Bekaa region, who subsequently process it into compost and sell it back to the local farmers in Majd El Meouch. Establishing a local compost production unit could allow manure produced in Majd El Meouch to stay within the community.

This makes manure compost more affordable for local farmers in the village, eliminating the costs associated with long-distance transportation.

Requirements to develop a local compost unit

Studying the land specifications, materials, water sources, costs, and other relevant needs for the development of a compost unit.

Training workers on proper compost production.

Establishing managerial duties and a business plan.

One or more person(s) should be hired to be in charge of managing the compost unit as a business in order to ensure its financial sustainability.



2. Produce Local Bio-Inputs

Access to locally-produced bio-inputs, such as bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides, is essential for promoting sustainable and regenerative farming practices.

Part of Jibal's scope of work is supporting farmer's transition to more agroecological practices, which was synergistic with local authorities and community interests.

“For example, soap is a key ingredient of bio-inputs. The assessment found that it can be supplied from the local winery or the local monastery”

Impact of Producing local bio-inputs

Maintaining better soil health and fertility without degrading the environment.

Supporting water retention and reducing the need for water use.

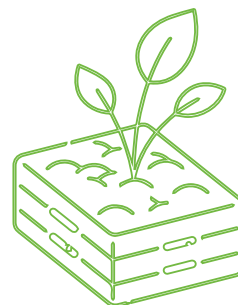
Enhancing the resilience of crops.

Stimulating crops natural defense.

Reducing dependency on hazardous chemical inputs that are harmful to health.

Reducing reliance on expensive imported inputs and promoting more cost-effective practices.

Higher effectiveness and improved agricultural outcomes in the long term period as compared with synthetic inputs.



According to the assessments conducted by Jibal, producing local bio-inputs would require:

Selection of one entity (whether a local person, committee, or cooperative) to coordinate and manage the procedures of local bio-input production.
Extensive training on bio-input production with farmers or workers coordinated or carried out by responsible entity;
Supporting farmers to plant the ingredients of the natural pesticides on one of their plots such as: garlic, onions, pepper, chinaberry (zenzlakht), aromatics
Collaborating with the local community to obtain ingredients for bio inputs. For example, soap is a key ingredient of bio-inputs. The assessment found that it can be supplied from the local winery or the local monastery.
Purchasing of necessary equipment for cooking the natural pesticides by the responsible entity selected.
While a Jibal assessment found that it is advantageous for the case of Majd El Meouch for each farmer to have their own on-farm bio-input production unit in the early phases of promoting local bio-input production, there is future potential for establishing a centralized production unit in the village at a later date when/if there is a greater demand.
The ideal scenario would be that the local agricultural cooperative manages the production of bio-inputs.
Collaborating with the local community to obtain ingredients for bio inputs. For example, soap is a key ingredient of bio-inputs. The assessment found that it can be supplied from the local winery or the local monastery.

3. Produce Seedlings in Local Nurseries

Only one local nursery exists in the village and the managing farmer has expressed a willingness to expand seedling production. Several other Majd El Meouch farmers possess private greenhouses that could be used for seedling production and sale. These farmers have expressed interest in establishing a nursery. This could significantly increase the production of seedlings in Majd El Meouch. This is important in the agricultural value chain since this input will be localized, alleviating the need to purchase more expensive imported inputs. Secondly, cultivating seedlings for sale could offer farmers with existing infrastructure an additional revenue stream.



Several farms possess potential for nursery establishment and can support diversified seedling production.
Expansion of the local nursery located on Tony Khalil's land will enable farmers in Majd El Meouch and surrounding villages to have access to local seedlings. At a later stage, other farmers might need support in establishing their own nurseries.
Plant species: Companion plant species should be included in the collection of plants produced in the nursery (aromatics, flowers, green cover, legume trees...) for variety and for providing a local source for these seedlings.
Management: Ideally, the co-operative would manage and coordinate the production of seedlings in the local nurseries.
Purchasing of necessary equipment for cooking the natural pesticides by the responsible entity selected.
While a Jibal assessment found that it is advantageous for the case of Majd El Meouch for each farmer to have their own on-farm bio-input production unit in the early phases of promoting local bio-input production, there is future potential for establishing a centralized production unit in the village at a later date when/if there is a greater demand.
The ideal scenario would be that the local agricultural cooperative manages the production of bio-inputs.

4. Establish an Agroecology Hub and partnership between monastery and the local agricultural cooperative

Majd El Meouch's local monastery holds a significant share of the village's agricultural land and engages in selling various products through various market channels including wholesale markets, retail markets, farmer's markets, among others.

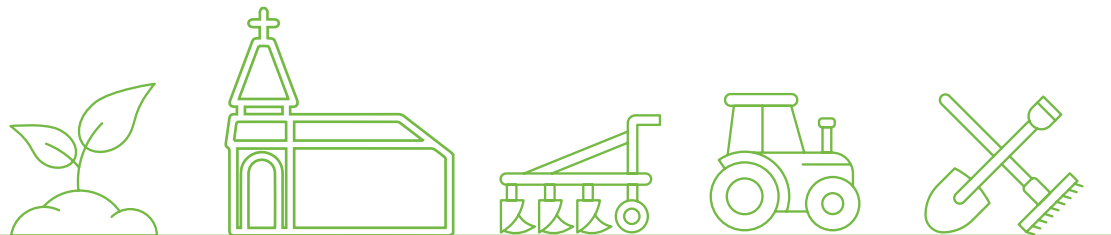
The assessments conducted by Jibal revealed that the monastery holds high standing and influence within the local community, actively participating in communal events and village affairs. Recognizing this influence, another project being implemented by Jibal is working on establishing model farms in Majd El Meouch, two of said farms located on lands on loan from the monastery.

Once these farms complete their gradual transition, they should serve as a successful demonstration of agroecological farming practices for other farmers. Due to constant changes in leadership, maintaining the model farms remains a challenge. The recent assessment conducted revealed that the monastery's cooperation with the agricultural cooperative could be beneficial. This could entail a long-term rental agreement that allows the cooperative to lead on transforming the monastery's lands into an agroecological hub.

Purchasing of necessary equipment for cooking the natural pesticides by the responsible entity selected.

While a Jibal assessment found that it is advantageous for the case of Majd El Meouch for each farmer to have their own on-farm bio-input production unit in the early phases of promoting local bio-input production, there is future potential for establishing a centralized production unit in the village at a later date when/if there is a greater demand.

The ideal scenario would be that the local agricultural cooperative manages the production of bio-inputs.



5. Diversify Local Crop Production

Jibal's assessment worked to identify and introduce new companion plants and cover crops that are suitable in Majd El Meouch's diverse altitudes in order to achieve multiple synergistic benefits for farmers such as enhanced soil health and better crop growth. These studies assessed which diversified crop combinations best align with market demand, especially if processed into traditional mouneh before sale, and could make local farmers a better profit.

These suggestions were presented to influential stakeholders like the monastery and municipality who could advise farmers, serving as a lighthouse.

At the request of the municipality, Jibal also provided farmers with insights on profitable crops and modernized mouneh production techniques, emphasizing the potential for higher revenue through diversification. coordinate the production of seedlings in the local nurseries.



Leafy greens



Gourds



Cruciferous vegetables



Root crops



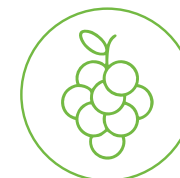
Beans



Fruits



Olives



Grapes



Thyme

6. Introduce Nature-based activities at the local school

Considering the findings of the assessment in Majd El Meouch it is evident that a significant portion of farmers, poultry farm owners, and mouneh producers are elders, with limited youth engagement existing in agricultural pursuits.

In response, it is recommended to introduce nature-based and farming activities for students enrolled in the private school run by the monastery. By exposing students to agricultural practices from an early age, there is a potential to cultivate interest and foster future involvement in farming and food production.

Proposed measures to implement this recommendation effectively

Allocate a dedicated plot of land for students to cultivate.

Develop a curriculum that incorporates nature-based activities, including farming, into the school's educational program.

Provide training to school staff on alternative education methodologies and gardening techniques.

Install an irrigation system to support the student pilot's water needs.

Establish an outdoor shaded area for students, if not already available.

Alternatively, if deemed appropriate, the local cooperative could take on the responsibility of organizing similar activities for children in the community, ensuring broader participation and engagement.



7. Utilize Territorial Food Plan as a strategic planning and networking document

Given Majd El Meouch's rurality and reputation for high-quality produce, the establishment of a comprehensive territorial food plan is strategic for networking and future funding opportunities with external organizations. The plan is to be utilized by the municipality to provide informed guidance on food and agriculture-related initiatives within the village.

Utilize the food plan to delineate clear and well-researched priorities to external entities such as potential NGO partners or donors.

Utilize the food plan document as a guiding document to assess whether partnerships or funds align with municipality objectives.

Utilize the food plan to raise additional funds for the projects and activities outlined.

Utilize the data gathered in the food plan document to inform and guide other regional initiatives and projects in the Chouf region.



8. Provide continuous support for the local agricultural cooperative

Agricultural cooperatives are powerful tools for producers to organize collectively and gain leverage in their endeavors. The cooperative should be supported as it provides benefits like offering an avenue for donor funding or optimizing the use of local resources through establishing collaborative agreements.

The Majd El Meouch agriculture cooperative was founded in 1981, and was only recently reactivated in 2023 after being dormant in the early 2000s.

Proposed measures to implement this recommendation effectively

Supporting the village to organize collectively via the cooperative and establish an efficient governance system

Provision of technical and administrative support in purchasing materials or raising donor funds.

Provision of guidance regarding ways to set collaborative strategies and priorities relevant to the larger farming community.



9. Organize annual local festivals and events

There are three significant events that occur at the communal level annually in Majd El Meouch: Mar Maroun, Assumption day, Christmas. These events bring together locals and the village's diaspora for full-day public gatherings in the village. These yearly community events hold the potential to re-introduce the community to the importance of food and agriculture which continue to serve as integral components of the village.

Promotion

Selling traditional mouneh products at organized public events, perhaps including live stations of mouneh being produced (the public can be invited to participate and learn).

Organizing a farmer's market and/or agricultural festival in the summer season when diaspora have returned to the village

Integrating agricultural activities and/or farmer's markets into existing holiday events.

Planning sessions and activities to inform local participants about the local production in Majd El Meouch.

Raising funds and donations from local participants, specifically among the diaspora.



JIBAL.ORG





2023 - 2024

Designed by Mike Malajalian