

## Peace Oil - Enjoy the Taste of Peace.

Can you speak to the obstacles faced by the Palestinian farmers who grow the olive trees. And to the obstacles faced by Israeli producers?

The biggest obstacle for Palestinian farmers is finding markets. They produce twice as much olive oil as they can use domestically. Since the 2nd intifada it has been harder to sell Palestinian products in Israel, so they are looking for markets around the world. Cnaan Fair Trade, the largest Palestinian olive oil exporter that started in business only five years ago has helped a lot with this effort. Peace Oil has done its small part as one of many groups, volunteers and businesses distributing Palestinian olive oil in the US.

As for the farming obstacles, to be sure, I don't know much about olive farming. There is a fly that is particularly damaging. But I know the Palestinian farmer I met, Fiyad, doesn't use any pesticides so



they can't be a major issue. It is dry and hot there, but, he doesn't even use irrigation. He says the Nabali tree is hardy enough it doesn't need any.

I suspect Israeli farmers use irrigation, but I wouldn't know how common it is. I do know of one Israeli farm in the Negev (Israeli dessert) that has a system of irrigation that drips a precise amount of water mixed with nutrients at the location of each tree. They have a very high yield on this farm. This is in strong contrast to the typical West Bank Palestinian farmer who uses minimal intervention.

Another problem that Palestinian farmers have had is the lack of knowledge of international standards.

Often the olives were not pressed quickly enough after harvest to produce the highest quality extra virgin oil. But with the work of Cnaan Fair Trade,



various Palestinian institutions, help from outside the country including from Israelis, they have quickly improved the quality of

their product to very high standards.

Another major obstacle in some areas is the occupation. According to the Applied Research Institute Jerusalem [[www.arj.org](http://www.arj.org)], a Palestinian NGO, over 500,000 olive trees have been destroyed since 2000. They attribute these losses to activities of the occupation forces such as building roads, settlements and the separation wall. Also, there have been numerous incidents of attacks by Jewish settlers on Palestinian farmers while they are trying to harvest, as well as intentional destruction of the olive trees. Violence does go both ways as a cycle of retribution has led to violent attacks on settlers by Palestinians. Furthermore, activist Israeli groups including B'tselem [[www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)] and Rabbis for Human Rights [[www.rhr-na.org](http://www.rhr-na.org)] have stood with Palestinian farmers protecting them from attack.

There are lots of tree planting programs you can contribute to. Cnaan Fair Trade, one of the suppliers of Peace Oil, has planted 38,400 trees between 2005 when they came into existence and 2009. Buying Peace Oil does contribute to this

project indirectly. But if you want to donate to programs directly Google **"help plant olive trees in Palestine"**.

### How did the Palestinians and Israelis come together for the Peace Oil Project?

They were already working together long before I came along and started selling Peace Oil. The idea that *all* Israelis and Palestinians never get along is a misconception promulgated by the media which naturally focuses on negative stories (isn't that what the news is for?).

Yes, there is lots of hostility and two very separate societies, but there are many, many examples of exceptions to the rule. Two are Israeli fair trade groups that supply some of the olive oil for the original Peace Oil. Currently, I am also selling each of their olive oils in its own bottle. These two groups are Sindyanna of Galilee [[www.sindyanna.com](http://www.sindyanna.com)] and Green Action [[www.fairtrade.org.il](http://www.fairtrade.org.il)]. Both are registered non-profits in the state of Israel. Both have worked with Palestinians for years.

Sindyanna was established in 1996 by Hadas Lahav, a Jew, and Samya Nasser, a Palestinian woman with a very interesting story. Her background doesn't fit the stereotype of an Arab Muslim female as her family of origin is not only secular but Communist.

Unlike other women in her small Arab Israeli town, she felt the need to obtain a higher education. To earn tuition she worked in a textile factory in a nearby Jewish city and in 1990 was able to graduate from Haifa University with a BA in History and Literature. She was recently a candidate for

the Israeli Parliament. Together Hadas and Samya sought to save the Arab Israeli olive economy and to empower Arab women. They teach the women job skills and help them gain self-confidence moving out into the world of work. Samya is now involved as a board member and with women's employment projects and Hadas is the day-to-day director.



Green Action has a number of projects some of which have nothing to do with olive oil. I have detailed these on my blog at [[www.peacoil.blogspot.com](http://www.peacoil.blogspot.com)]. One, of course, is helping Palestinian farmers form cooperatives in the West Bank to develop their olive oil and other agricultural products.

Avi Levi, the director of Green Action, has been



going into the West Bank for several years to work with the farmers. During the harvest season, teams of Green Action

volunteers go to help with the harvest. Quite a contrast to those settlers who attack harvesters!

As you can see, Israel is a divided society just like here in the US, but instead of Red and Blue they have Pro-Peace and Pro-Expansion (and of course, everything in-between, just like here). One of the goals of Peace Oil is to help the Pro-Peace segment of Israeli society.

I don't know much about the history of Green Action and how Avi started his project in the West Bank, but I do know a little about his personal

journey. We traveled together in May 2009 to visit Fiyiyad in the West Bank. See the October 2009 blog for the story *Living in the Dark* which describes this trip in detail:

[\[peacoil.blogspot.com/2009\\_10\\_01\\_archive.html\]](http://peacoil.blogspot.com/2009_10_01_archive.html).

#### Where are the three Fair Trade Groups located?

Canaan Fair Trade [\[www.canaanfairtrade.com\]](http://www.canaanfairtrade.com) is based in Jenin, in the northern portion of the West Bank. Jenin was a major center for Palestinian refugees after the expulsion in 1948. Today, portions of it are still UN refugee camps, even though it has grown into a busy urban center.

Early on in the second Intifada, an Israeli soldier in a bulldozer rampaged through the center of town, flattening homes and killing and injuring many. So, it is a place that can always benefit from good news, and Canaan Fair Trade has been just that. In 2008 they completed the building of a new olive pressing plant with the help of German lenders. It is a state of the art facility and is providing employment for local residents and income for communities throughout the area and the West Bank.

Sindyanna of Galilee is located in the northern region of Israel well-known for its rolling hills and green plains. It has the best farmland in Israel Palestine and is home to most of Israel's 1.5 million Arabs. The town where their main facility is located is an Arab Israeli town nestled on fairly steep hills. The name of this town is Kafr Kanna, which possibly is the ancient town known as Cana of Galilee.

Green Action has its offices in Tel Aviv.

#### Can you explain about the fair trade certification process for the farmers and the producers?

The fair trade concept began in US churches in the 40s that wanted to help developing nations by buying their products and selling them in the community – very grassroots – SERRV and 10,000 Villages are descendants of this movement.

The main certifying agency in the world today is the Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO), [\[www.fairtrade.net\]](http://www.fairtrade.net) based in Europe. FLO operates in the US under the name TransFair USA [\[http://www.transfairusa.org/\]](http://www.transfairusa.org/). FLO and other smaller certifiers review proposed products and if they meet stringent criteria certify them as fair trade and provide a widely recognized symbol so customers know it is “kosher”.

There are also umbrella organizations that provide fair trade authenticity to its members. Being a member requires you meet fairly stringent criteria, but does not mean your products are fair trade certified. That is up to the product certifiers.

These organizations have come up with several definitions of “fair trade”, but there are no legal definitions or laws. The criteria for a product being labeled as FLO certified are summarized as follows:

To receive certification producers, importers and retailers must adhere to: International Labor Organization agreements banning child and slave labor, guaranteeing a safe workplace and the right to unionize, adherence to the United Nations charter of human rights, a fair price that covers the cost of production and facilitates social development, protection and conservation of the environment, promoting long-term business relationships between buyers and sellers, crop

pre-financing, and greater transparency throughout the supply chain.

As for the fair trade groups I am involved with here's the story. Sindyanna is a member of the World Fair Trade Organization [[www.wfto.com](http://www.wfto.com)]. Its products are certified by IMO a much smaller product certifier than FLO based in Switzerland.

Canaan Fair Trade was created to be the marketing arm of the Palestine Fair Trade Association [[www.palestinefairtrade.org](http://www.palestinefairtrade.org)] which promotes fair trade in Palestine in the farming communities. They have organized producers into informal coops throughout the West Bank and CFT sells their products.



Green Action is just beginning the process of obtaining FLO certification for its products. They currently use a logo they designed themselves. It is the SAHA logo and combines Hebrew,

English and Arabic. I think it is a very beautiful logo!

The farmers do not have to be fair trade certified, but the fair trade buyers must make sure the farmers meet the fair trade requirements. For example, the farmers must pay a fair wage to their workers and treat them well under all labor laws and conventions. Also, they don't need to be certified organic, but must not use pesticides and other unsustainable practices.

**How is Peace Oil different from European olive oil?**

It's very different from my limited experience. People who are really into Italian, Greek and

Spanish olive oils have to take quite a leap to develop a taste for Palestinian olive oil. However, most people aren't so picky and the oil tastes just fine to them. The Nabali olive is very distinct in its fruity flavor and flowery aroma. Palestinians can tell Nabali oil just by smelling it. There are many types of olives grown in Europe and the main taste factor is the olive variety. Frantoio, Leccino in Italy, Arbequina and Manzanilla in Spain, and Kalamita in Greece are some of the better known European olives, but there are literally hundreds of varieties.

The other olive used in Peace Oil is the Barnea, a modern Israeli cultivar. It has a significantly higher yield than the Nabali and is easier to get a lower free fatty acid content[\*]. As a result, many of the Arab Israeli farmers have switched to the Barnea and Sindyanna Peace Oil is predominantly Barnea olives. Palestinians in the West Bank won't touch the Barnea! They don't even consider it olive oil. I like them both.



even a minimal salary by selling it through the retail distribution system. So far, I am not having much luck with online sales. It sells OK in the holiday season, but not the rest of the year.

**How do you market Peace Oil in the United States? Are there outlets in California?**

Currently I am trying to build sales online as I can't pay myself

I do still ship to stores which were carrying Peace Oil in the past and continue to order. If new stores order I'll accommodate them, but I'm not actively seeking new stores.

The only outlet in California is the Rainbow Grocery Cooperative [[www.rainbowgrocery.org](http://www.rainbowgrocery.org)] in San Francisco, but they haven't ordered any in awhile so I doubt they have any in stock. However, Cnaan Fair Trade recently made a deal with a US company called Alter Eco Fair Trade [[www.altereco-usa.com](http://www.altereco-usa.com)]. They are selling CFT oil under the Alter Eco brand in all 130 Whole Foods stores nationwide and other natural foods markets across the US. So now you can buy Palestinian olive oil right alongside Italian, Spanish, Greek, California, etc. In a local store in my neighborhood, they recently added Alter Eco on the shelf right above Peace Oil.

#### **How can we further our solidarity with these peacemakers in the Holy Land?**

Cnaan Fair Trade's website has a shopping page. They are large enough to maintain a warehouse in the US and can usually deliver all their products in a timely manner.

The Palestine Fair Trade Association has a page where you can find out about visiting Palestine and volunteering for the harvest. I think that would be a lot of fun.

Sindyanna and Green Action are small non-profits, so their web pages show their products but you can't really order online. If you see something you like on Sindyanna's website, you can email them at [sindyan@netvision.net.il](mailto:sindyan@netvision.net.il). If they have the product in stock, they will give you the details, and you can use a credit card to pay on their donation/payment page. Air shipment of smaller packages is cost effective, but if you order a large quantity of heavier items you might want to go by sea which is much cheaper but can take a long time to ship.

Green Action's fair trade products are shown at [www.fairtrade.org.il](http://www.fairtrade.org.il). I don't think they'll ship outside of Israel, but you can see a list of their stores on the website and next time you're in Israel you can pick something up!

The easiest way to support all three groups is to buy Peace Oil Original. To support Sindyanna, buy Peace Oil Sindyanna and to support Green Action, buy Peace Oil Green Action. All three are available at [www.peaceoil.net](http://www.peaceoil.net).

## Footnotes:

The Applied Research Institute Jerusalem  
[www.arj.org](http://www.arj.org)

B'tselem, Israeli Human Rights Organization  
[www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)

Rabbis for Human Rights, North America  
[www.rhr-na.org](http://www.rhr-na.org)

Rabbis for Human Rights, Israel  
(click on the "English" button near the top)  
[www.rhr.org.il](http://www.rhr.org.il)

Google search for how to help plant trees in Palestine  
[help plant olive trees in Palestine](#)

Sindyanna of Galilee  
[www.sindyanna.com](http://www.sindyanna.com)

Green Action Israel  
[www.fairtrade.org.il](http://www.fairtrade.org.il)

Blog about Green Action  
(note: misspelling of "peace" in peacoil is correct for this URL)  
[www.peacoil.blogspot.com](http://www.peacoil.blogspot.com)

Blog about David Sokal and Avi Levy's trip to West Bank  
[www.peacoil.blogspot.com/2009\\_10\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.peacoil.blogspot.com/2009_10_01_archive.html)

Canaan Fair Trade  
[www.canaanfairtrade.com](http://www.canaanfairtrade.com)

Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO)  
[www.fairtrade.net](http://www.fairtrade.net)

TransFair USA  
[www.transfairusa.org](http://www.transfairusa.org)

World Fair Trade Organization  
[www.wfto.com](http://www.wfto.com)

Palestine Fair Trade Association  
[www.palestinefairtrade.org](http://www.palestinefairtrade.org)

\*Free fatty acid is a chemistry term for a fat molecule that has separated from a fat chain. It has nothing to do with the acidity that most of us associate with lemons or vinegar. The more free fatty acid in olive oil, the lower the quality and the faster it is likely to break down and become rancid. Free fatty acid is formed when the healthy fatty acid chains in olive oil, such as the monosaturated fats, break down through hydrolysis and auto-oxidation.

Rainbow Grocery: A Worker Owned Cooperative  
[www.rainbowgrocery.org](http://www.rainbowgrocery.org)

Alter Eco Fair Trade  
[www.altereco-usa.com](http://www.altereco-usa.com)

Email to contact Sindyanna of Galilee  
[sindyan@netvision.net.il](mailto:sindyan@netvision.net.il)

Buy Peace Oil  
[www.peaceoil.net/html\\_1/buy\\_peace\\_oil.html](http://www.peaceoil.net/html_1/buy_peace_oil.html)