



• Creativity • Collaboration • Continuity • Community

IN THIS ISSUE:

FEATURE STORY:

► SAIDOUN TAKES ITS FIRST STEPS IN FAIR TRADE [Pages 1-2](#)

LET'S FOCUS: HABIBA ORGANIC FARM IN SINAI [Pages 3-4](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS [Page 2](#)

LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS:

► HEALTHY FOOD DIET - IS IT OK TO CHEAT? [Page 5](#)

► LEBANESE ENGINEERS BUILD A FIREFIGHTING DRONE [Page 6](#)

PHOTO OF THE MONTH [Page 7](#)

FEATURE STORY

SAIDOUN BECOMES A FAIR TRADE TOWN - THE JOURNEY BEGINS

It's official: our village of Saidoun (Jezzine caza - South Lebanon) has become one of the first **Fair Trade Towns in Lebanon**. The mission of Fair Trade Towns in Lebanon is to increase **Fair Trade** awareness by encouraging ethical **local production** and **preserving the environment**.

Fair Trade works for the development of communities. The Fair Trade network counts more than **1,700 towns worldwide** and aims at spreading the concept of Fair Trade to improve responsible producer and consumer behavior. The Lebanese Fair trade Towns are part of a pilot project and include: Ain Ebel in Bint Jbeil; Qleyaa in Marjeyoun; Abra in Saida; Kfar Tibnit in Nabatiyeh; Baskinta in Metn; Albisariya in Saida; Mhaydtheh in Rashaya; Ferzol in Zahle; Menjez in Akkar; and Saidoun in Jezzine.

This summer, each of the 10 towns organized its Fair Trade Day. Saidoun's celebration was held on **August 8, 2015** in the little Shoumra street overlooked by the church and the old public school building which has become a small community center proposing courses. The day featured local produce and crafts by the people of Saidoun and their friends.

Although the honey harvest suffered all across Lebanon this year, due to erratic weather conditions, Saidoun's honey was featured during the day, with beekeeper *Bassam Khawand* presenting a small glass-fronted display hive to explain the inner workings of a bee colony. Saj-baked mana'eesh also greeted the early visitors, alongside cookies and traditional pantry products like mulberry syrup, jams, preserves, dried herbs, and floral waters, as well as Arak. Celebrity chef *Sleiman Khawand*, a native of Saidoun, worked with the women of Saidoun to put together a 12-course traditional buffet lunch with a modern twist.

Continued on Page 2



► [back to contents](#)



FEATURE STORY

Continued from Page 1

Crafts included ceramic jewelry by US-based artist Ghada Khawand and Sister Lina Khawand of the Antonine order. Rita Aoun featured her hand-made baskets and crochet items. Finally, our friends in Maghdoucheh from the Dignity Project cooperative showcased their beautiful woolwork, including felt items, crochet and knitting (Read more about Dignity in [L.E.T.S. Lebanon Issue #18](#)).

We invited our friend and circus entertainer *Hadi Deaibes* to entertain the children (and adults) at the event. The **Saidoun Youth Group** had a fresh juice stand and also helped with artistic activities for children. The **Saidoun Municipality** surprised us with a folk dance troupe it had hired to get people into *dabke* dancing mode after lunch and give them an energy boost. Finally, *Toni Khawand* took visitors on a guided tour of the village, introducing them to its terrain, history and flora.

In addition to coordinating with Fair Trade Lebanon and all the participants, our own contribution at **SOILS** involved setting up an information and souvenir booth featuring handmade lavender bags and hydrosol bottles (a first experiment we conducted in Saidoun with our friend *Amani Dagher* this year). Another booth was dedicated to Saidoun's fauna and flora, with the help of Toni. Finally, we designed small scales for a Fair Trade booth to explain the difference between Fair Trade and conventional (capitalist) practices.

Shared by the Editorial Team



[▶ back to contents](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

HORSH BEIRUT RE-OPENING PUBLIC VENUE



EVERY SATURDAY

7:00 a.m - 7:00 p.m.

Near Tayyouneh roundabout, Beirut

Beirut's largest green area is now reopen to the public!

"ART & NATURE WEEKEND - MACAM" ARTISTIC & CULINARY CELEBRATION



SEPTEMBER 12-13, 2015

11:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

MACAM Modern and Contemporary Art Museum, Alita - Jbeil

Food tasting, yoga and more. Buses available from/to Beirut

<https://www.facebook.com/events/1639965576217850/>

"AYYAM AL OULOUM" OUTDOOR SCIENCE EXHIBITION



OCTOBER 9-11, 2015

11:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Horsh Beirut, near Tayyouneh roundabout, Beirut

Fee: LBP 5,000/person
*Children under 16 years: Free

<https://www.facebook.com/events/880195245349619/>

[▶ back to contents](#)



LET'S FOCUS

REBUILDING SINAI'S SOIL AND PEOPLE WITH PERMACULTURE

At the **Habiba Organic Farm (HOF)** in **Nuweiba, South Sinai (Egypt)**, we look up to the philosophies of permaculture, and biodynamic and organic farming to help turn our barren desert into a green paradise while developing a sustainable agricultural community that will match and adapt to our unique climate. Our model of sustainable agriculture is focused on building a productive cycle that will include every sector of our local community .

The idea of HOF sprang from the extreme fragility of the tourism sector, which proved to have no immunity whatsoever to the political and security turmoil that hit our region in sole incidents or in waves over the past 20 years. With the continuing instability of the economic and political situation, we had to come up with alternative solutions that would fill the vacuum left by the suffering tourism sector. Like the overwhelming majority of people in South Sinai, my income depended on a beach lodge which I rented out to tourists. This used to be my sole source of income and I suddenly found myself stranded when the tourists no longer came. Luckily, I had learned about alternative agriculture and agro-tourism in my travels, so we decided to try it. We began funnelling the profits from the beach lodge into developing HOF.

REBUILDING THE LAND- - - - -

We proudly began at square zero, and trial and error is the method by which we built our now highly productive farm. Travellers and **WWOOFers** visiting our community have helped us, they arrived loaded with ideas and models of other farms from across the globe, and we picked up what was suitable and what we found achievable. By researching over the internet, calling experts on the phone and travelling to farms in different parts of the world, we were able to adopt different projects and models of sustainable agriculture in arid environments. Ideas shared by renowned permacultivators such as *Geoff Lawton* are a precious resource for us.

Water: Our only source of water at HOF and South Sinai is **underground wells**, adding the challenge of water management to many issues we work tirelessly to resolve. Much of the land in Nuweiba suffers from **saltwater intrusion**, which drives us to maintain an ever-turning cycle of learning and experimentation to identify plants that can grow and flourish with high-salinity water. We are also developing our methods of conserving the already scarce fresh water.

Soil: Like most arable land across Egypt, the soil at HOF started out very alkaline. It took us years of dedicated composting and adding to the soil to balance it out; now we can grow all sorts of plants, fruits and vegetables, even those from very different environments that were viewed as impossible to grow here.

Despite the availability of high-tech solutions to each and every one of our problems, we are careful to stay only one step ahead of the farmers in the Bedouin communities surrounding us. After all, our main goal is to inspire and assist them in building a feasible agricultural community that could survive under the challenging conditions of South Sinai.

Crops: One of our most successful experiments was growing the miracle tree, ***Moringa Olifera***. The seeds were initially brought to us by a German friend, and that constituted the full extent of our Moringa-knowledge. Once again, with the help of the internet and various academic resources, our knowledge went from barely being able to describe the seed to testing the different ways of growing it in different microclimates - even growing it under stress.

Our experiments revolve around the ways of growing any plant in our sandy soil, the successful Moringa experiment might have been of medium benefit for HOF - but demonstrating to our community how it can be done in our climate was our priceless reward. With a bit of help, such a plant could be an unprecedented source of income to them. Now that one of our Bedouin friends has launched a Moringa farm of around five productive acres, we can confidently call it a success story, but it didn't stop there, Moringa is becoming a staple plant in the gardens of many houses around us. With the health benefits of the plant, and the Bedouins' ancient knowledge of natural remedies, this tree has become a fixture in every family's pharmacy.

Quinoa was another project sparked by visitors with wheat intolerance who came to us loaded with the first batch of seeds and some of the required knowledge to grow it . Over the past year, we grew Quinoa in different ways—in the sun and in greenhouses – and we gathered sufficient knowledge for coming years. Such crops can give HOF and the community the sustainability we sought at the early beginning of our project.



Continued on Page 4

► [back to contents](#)



SAVE PAPER – Do you really need to print this newsletter?

L.E.T.S. Lebanon

PAGE 3/7

LET'S FOCUS

Continued from Page 3

In very simple words, tourists come and go, but plants always grow, and even when Nuweiba is bustling with tourists again, people will realize they cannot eat banknotes.

INVOLVING THE SINAI COMMUNITY-----

From the beginning, we decided our dream had to be shared with the community with whom we had shared our lives for decades. This community had never ceased to impress us with its boundless generosity and hospitality, so sharing our model was our humble way of paying our community back. We strongly believed that if this was to become the rising tide, it would undoubtedly raise all ships.

Several years ago, HOF was the only organic farming project in the region, while more than 40 conventional farms were kicked off. But with persistence and involving more members of the community, a Bedouin neighbor became the second organic farming pioneer in Nuweiba. Our dream of organic farming is colossal, and we are patiently waiting for the rest of our community to transform. The region had relied on the easy profits from the tourism sector for decades, but we have no doubt that one day our people will begin resurrecting the methods and passions of their ancestors, they will slowly but surely turn from conventional agriculture to organic farming and will also turn their back on conventional mass tourism to embrace the more sustainable models of ecotourism and agro-tourism.

Alongside our ongoing effort to steer the older generations toward HOF and similar models, we established a **learning center** for the younger ones. We realized that our community's future would be brighter if the children of today grew up with the ethics and ideals or a more sustainable mindset. The learning center began operating in 2012 and we are already seeing a difference in the behavior of children who used to have no access to schooling. But nothing was more rewarding than these children's mothers who were won over by the gradual improvement they saw in their children. "We want to learn as well," they started to ask us.

All of our endeavours, our farming and community development ideas are simply about engaging with our community. We see Habiba Organic Farm as a seed bank built by the community and sustained for the good of that community.

REACHING OUT TO LARGER COMMUNITIES-----

In the beginning, the pace was slow, one step at a time, but we finally succeeded and now the farm has expanded into a reputable demonstration and experimentation farm built on a total area of **20,000 m²**. We purchased the land over two phases, in parallel to the stages of building our infrastructure which included digging a well for irrigation and a guesthouse to accommodate the workers, volunteers and visitors. The first lot, almost half the size of the current farm, went into full operation in 2007, while the second was launched in 2009.

Now, we are at a stage where workshops and "**voluntourism**" generate most of the funding for HOF. The income is not yet enough to fully support the farm, but it is a major leap forward in comparison to when we began in 2007. Promoting the guest house and selling some of our products to transiting tourists or foreign residents of South Sinai also contribute to our income. Hopefully in the near future, when Sinai returns to some form of stability, our market share of the tourism will grow and further sustain the agricultural project.

In 2013 we began our cooperation plan with the **National Desert Research Centre**, an academic centre focused on desert communities and all of their aspects. Together we continue to test new crops and more sophisticated methods of cultivation. Our interest in broadening our involvement with academic research centers never ceases to grow; after all, we will always be on one learning curve after the another.

GET INVOLVED: VISIT US OR SIGN UP FOR THE PDC COURSE-----

In **December**, we will be hosting a **Permaculture Design Certificate (PDC)** course led by a British expert.

To find out more about the lessons we have learned and how to put them into practice, follow us on Facebook [Habiba Organic Farm \(HOF\)](#), or even better, drop by to taste our organic produce.

For more info, please visit our website: www.habibaorganicfarm.com

Shared by Maged el Said



► [back to contents](#)



LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

THE VIRTUES OF CHEATING: CAUGHT RED-HANDED COMMITTING THE ULTIMATE DIETARY SIN

Richard Labaki (www.renyourevitalize.com) is a holistic therapist specialized in natural anti-aging therapies. His program "RenYou" tackles the imbalances in the body that contribute to accelerated aging and poor health through nutritional therapy, supplement intake and lifestyle modification - taking into consideration each person's unique case in terms of their needs and challenges.

Several friends and clients regard me as some sort of a "health cop" and are always worried to eat unhealthy snacks/meals when I am around. Some even joke about my being so strict in public only to secretly binge on bad choices in the dark corners of a fast food restaurant. Well I have a confession to make: There is some truth to this joke. I do cheat and eat unhealthy stuff. However, there are viable reasons as to why I do it. But first, let me tell you about that fateful day when I decided to go super clean and avoid bad choices entirely. Foods that I know are lousy for health were completely omitted from the daily menu. Sugars, bad types of oils, wheat products (bread, cakes, croissants), corn and others were no longer consumed. And in the beginning, this felt great; body-fat percentage was dropping consistently, energy levels were increasing and mood was brightening! I was finally doing everything right and implementing all the knowledge that I spent years accumulating through research. But then something peculiar began to emerge. My system became **hypersensitive** to anything that is toxic or remotely unhealthy. The slightest exposure to bad compounds – be it through food, water or air – was instantly felt in my body. The symptoms ranged from headaches, tummy aches, nausea and others. I could no longer eat at restaurants, even if my selection was more or less healthy (there is no control over the ingredients used in restaurants). Then I remembered something that I learned in a course I took during my clinical nutrition studies.



*Taro and coconut ice cream
Photo by Matthew Klein*

Professor Hans Selye described a 5-stage process in 1956, which he named the **General Adaptation Syndrome**. The first stage is the "**Initial Response**" – your first response to any substance is the best indicator of whether or not it suits you (your first cup of coffee, alcoholic beverage, sugary treat and others). The second stage is "**Adaptation**" – your body learns to adapt to the substances, which it cannot tolerate or which cause a certain degree of harm. An example would be the lessening of symptoms caused by smoking a cigarette (no more coughing) or drinking coffee (no more heart palpitations). What is happening at this level is that the body tries to protect itself; nevertheless, this adaptation places a certain strain on the body. Third stage is "**Exhaustion**" – at this level the body is no longer able to cope with the continuous exposure to the nasty compound. You simply become sick and the diseases could take on various shapes (from cardiovascular problems to cancer and everything in between). This is when most people seek professional help. Fourth stage is "**Recovery**" – your body heals when you limit or omit altogether the exposure to undesirable elements/substances. You simply try to wean yourself off all things to which you are addicted or allergic (with the help of a therapist who would administer the right natural supplements and devise the proper food regimen). The fifth and final stage is "**Hypersensitivity**" – this in effect is going back to stage one after your body is healthy again. And this is when you may seem to be hypersensitive to substances that did not affect you negatively before (although they were surely doing harm without your noticing it). Certain alcoholic beverages, ordinary foods, dairy products and fumes could start causing some reactions in your body.

And it was at this stage that I started experiencing this hypersensitivity. Now this phenomenon would theoretically go away or lessen after being healthy for a while. Yet, I personally believe that a better approach would be to allow yourself a certain degree of exposure but in a regulated manner. Doing so would keep you somehow balanced. After all, we live in a heavily polluted world and there is no escaping toxins or bad food additives completely. And one way to regulate your exposure is by allowing yourself to cheat once every five or six days. However, you surely need to avoid anything that causes severe allergic reactions. Moreover, you need to control your portions. Another benefit of cheating once a week is the positive effect it has on your commitment levels. Knowing that you will be able to eat that which you desire at a given day will motivate you to remain fully clean for six consecutive days. Psychologically, you will be more compelled to adhere to your healthy habits. And this is why I constantly urge my friends and clients to cheat in a controlled fashion every week. The cheating could span the entire day or be limited to a certain food item you crave the most – the choice is ultimately yours. So the next time you catch me at a restaurant devouring unhealthy meals and some wickedly mouthwatering dessert, know that it is officially my cheat day!

Shared by Richard Labaki

This article was originally published on the RenYou website:

<http://www.renyourevitalize.com/blog/2015/8/16/the-virtues-of-cheating-caught-red-handed-committing-the-ultimate-dietary-sin>

► [back to contents](#)



LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

WILDFIRES BUSTED - LEBANON'S QUADROFIGHTER IS ON PATROL

Two Lebanese students recently created the **QuadroFighter**, an app-supported firefighting drone designed to improve responses to **wildfires**. Their invention won first place in the **national Microsoft Imagine Cup in April**. It went on to compete in the semi-finals of the Pan-Arab edition of the event in Bahrain last May, where it captured attendees' attention and received media coverage from BBC Arabic.

The QuadroFighter responds to a very real problem. Official figures show that Lebanon has lost over two thirds of its forests in 50 years, shrinking the size of forested areas to less than 13% of the total land area. According to the Association for Forests, Development & Conservation (AFDC), 83% of forest areas in Lebanon face high risks of wildfires. Difficult terrain, inadequate roads, and - more importantly - the absence of a national strategy to combat forest fires, hinder civil defense efforts to put out such fires.

MEET THE E-FIREFIGHTERS

Nicolas Zaatar and Charlie Khoury, both aged 22 years old and fresh graduates of the Lebanese American University (LAU) – Faculty of Engineering, decided to try to do something about this. In 2014, Zaatar had seen first-hand the difficulty of controlling forest fires when he tried to assist firefighters in putting out a forest near his home. He joined up with Khoury and together they built their prototype with their own funds. Some of the parts they needed were not available locally, or cost a lot to import, so they partnered with a 3D printing company (3D Corp ME) to build them, as well as other customized parts. Their first invention was named the QuadCopter, later renamed QuadroFighter. [...] "A lot of national and international environmental NGOs have made enquiries about QuadroFighter, and are enthusiastic to know the release date of our product. Charlie and I applied to several accelerators and can't wait to officially start," said Zaatar.

IMPROVED MONITORING, ALERT AND RESPONSE RATE

The QuadroFighter can be programmed by users to monitor a specific area on the map, using either a mobile app or a desktop application. Once its course is set, the drone will monitor the area and immediately alert users in case it detects a fire starting. It will also send them the right coordinates via the app. An integrated **GPS tracking system** helps keep track of the drone's position. "Our drone is able to determine the coordinates of fires using complex and advanced algorithms adopted in the image processing technique," explained Khoury. A hardware controller communicates its status, i.e. whether it is on a mission, idle, malfunctioning, etc. The drone is battery-operated, and has a base station that enables it to autonomously recharge itself, ensuring 24/7 dynamic monitoring.

QUADROFIGHTER V 2.0 AVAILABLE ON THE MARKET SOON

After their participation in the Pan-Arab Microsoft Imagine Cup, Zaatar and Khoury decided to continue working on their project and turn it into an actual startup. The team has grown to include two more young talents ready to tackle the upcoming challenges. The team is now working on a new, more advanced model that will be faster and more efficient, with funding from the Kafalat Startups and Innovation program. Among other planned improvements, the two engineers are working on increasing the drone's range to cover an area beyond 4 km² – which is achievable according to their research. It will also include a live feed camera. Zaatar and Khoury said the prototype has already been tested in a natural reserve, and it has proven to be successful. However, the final product will soon be released and made accessible to private users. The product that hits the market will be monitored to guarantee its ethical use, as well as predict any hardware failure to accelerate problem detection and solution. The QuadroFighter is addressed to governments, environmental NGOs, and private land owners who possess green areas threatened by wildfires. According to Zaatar, it would be an alternative to many of the bulky and expensive fire detection solutions currently available and in use. "Our users wouldn't require any special skills to operate the plane, as this is a simple plug-and-play system with an easy to use interface," said Khoury.

Shared by Alexis Baghdadi

This article was originally published on the ArabNet website: <http://news.arabnet.me/wildfire-lebanon-firefighting-drone-startup/>



Charlie Khoury (left) and Nicolas Zaatar (right) at the Microsoft Imagine Cup Pan-Arab edition in Bahrain



PHOTO OF THE MONTH

You sent us your submissions and you voted for your favorites. Here it is, the PHOTO OF THE MONTH:
To send us your photos, email us on contact.soilslebanon@gmail.com



Cedars, Lebanon

Photo by Michel Sawan

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Michel-Sawans-Photography/683327678390908>

► [back to contents](#)

GET IN TOUCH, GET INVOLVED


Do you enjoy reading this newsletter?


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Heading photo courtesy of Habiba Organic Farm

A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

"The thing that gave me the most pain in life, psychologically, and it gave me tremendous pain psychologically, is man's disrespect for nature."



—Roberta Joan "Joni" Mitchell

► [back to contents](#)

