Agricultural Achievements

Despite the decline in its importance versus other economic branches, agriculture has been growing in absolute terms and still plays an important part in Israel's economy, representing today some 2.0 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and about 3.5 percent of exports.

Agricultural inputs produced in Israel are valued today at over $2 billion, of which 70% are exported.

Agriculture is of major national importance; in certain areas, such as the Arava and the Jordan Valley, it provides the sole means of livelihood for the population. In 1996 approximately 73,500 people were involved in farming, constituting about 3.0 percent of the country's workforce.

In monetary terms, Israel produces almost 70% of all its food requirements. It imports much of its grain, oilseeds, meat, fish, sugar, coffee and cocoa. However, these imports are offset by exports of agricultural produce valued at around $800 million and $600 million worth of processed foods per annum.

Today, just under a quarter of the income of Israel's farmers derives from the export of fresh produce, including items such as flowers, avocados, out-of-season vegetables and certain exotic fruits grown for export.

In 1996 some 140,000 tons of fruit and vegetables - 14 percent of the entire crop - were sold to factories for processing and export.

Since Israel attained its independence in 1948, the total area under cultivation has increased from 165,000 ha to some 435,000 ha and the number of agricultural communities has grown from 400 to 900 (including 136 Arab villages).

During the same period, agricultural production has expanded 16-fold, more than three times the rate of the population growth.

Israel's varied climatic, topographical and soil conditions (from sub-tropical to arid, from 400 meters below sea level to 1000 meters above and from sand dunes to heavy alluvial soils) made it possible to grow a wide range of agricultural produce.

The success of the country's agriculture stems from the determination and ingenuity of farmers and scientists who have dedicated themselves to developing a flourishing agriculture in a country which is more than half desert, thus demonstrating that the real value of land is a function of how it is used.

The fact that agricultural production continued to grow despite severe water and land limitations was no accident. It was the result of another unique Israeli phenomenon: a close and on-going cooperation between researchers, extension workers, farmers and agriculture-related services and industries.

Continuous, application-oriented research and development (R&D) has been carried out in the country since the beginning of the century. The agricultural sector today is based almost entirely on
science-linked technology, with government agencies, academic institutions, industry and cooperative bodies working together to seek solutions to problems and meet new challenges.

Dealing with subjects ranging from plant genetics and blight control to arid-zone cultivation, Israel's agricultural R&D has developed science-based technologies which have dramatically enhanced the quantity and quality of the country's produce.

The key to this success lies in the two-way flow of information between research personnel and farmers. Through a network of extension services (and active farmers' involvement in all R&D stages), problems in the field are brought directly to the researcher for solutions, and scientific results are quickly transmitted to the field for trial, adaptation and implementation.

>> For Additional Reading:

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MFA
www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/Economy/Focus+on+Israel+-+Israel+-+Agriculture+in+the+21st.htm

YouTube
www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzLHfiknNnc

Wikipedia
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agricultural_research_in_Israel