



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE JORDANIAN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

JEPA's contribution to awareness raising and guidance in world market trends

Corporate Social Responsibility (SCR) and sustainable economic development are becoming dominant factors in the international agricultural markets.

JEPA is therefore guiding the sector towards a more inclusive, circular agricultural business model by showcasing and interviewing good examples and international best practices for CSR and sustainability.

We start this series of interviews with the MAIDA COMPANY, one of the frontrunner olive oil companies in Jordan. We met with the General Manager and Director, Ms. Amelia Bilbeisi, along with the CEO, Mr. Ziad Bilbeisi, on the farm in order to learn from their experiences.

Question: - Can you tell us about your company, when did you start, the nature of the farm, and what kind of trees you plant there?

Mr. Bilbeisi: "The Company was established in 2008.

We purchased land in the desert area south of Amman and we started planting olive trees in

2010. Those trees were bought from Spain, because we can grow several varieties in Jordan. The land is in the desert, which means that it does not have electricity or water supply. Everything that we have done in the farm is based on CSR methods where we can use the environment to the best advantage we have.

Many people are looking at CSR nowadays, special those that are interested in exporting to international markets.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be split into environmental, social, and government. The good and bad thing about CSR is that there are no regulations on CSR, so it comes down to you as an individual company, and what you believe in.”

“Our CSR is heavily geared towards the environment and one of our main visions is obviously quality, but always the environment comes first. Because we control the whole value chain from tree to table, we implement environmental CSR throughout the entire value chain, and this is very specific to us.

Each company has to look at its production or manufacturing and they have to see what is important to them, what they believe in and incorporate CSR that way.”

Question: “What can you tell about Sustainable Development and how this applies to your workers?”

Mr. Bilbeisi: “One thing that has to be taken into consideration is the health care and safety of the people working in the farm. Specifically, because the farm is geared toward using machinery. Therefore, the welfare, and the safety factors implied, in the farm should be adhered to very well. You have to have a working policy to do that. This policy should be to protect the people that are working in your farm, the environment and protect us as well.”

Question: “Can you give an example of sustainable tools you use on the farm?”



Mr. Bilbeisi: - “Due to the fact that the farm is in the desert and Jordan in general ranks second in terms of water scarcity, therefore, we have to think about sustainable irrigation systems and sustainability of power. Regarding the farm, the area does not generate enough wind that we can depend on for power supply. Therefore, we turned to photovoltaic cells. We also worked out the minimum irrigation requirement per tree to stay within sustainable policy.

Anything we irrigate is within the farm and the mill. We recycle the water in order to save as much water as possible, and that is all done through either separator or sewage treatment plants. Even for the water usage for the workers, we have sewage treatment plants so that the water can be used again. “

Mrs. Bilbeisi - “We tried to adhere to a zero waste policy so anything that we can reuse and recycle throughout the entire chain, we do. We also carry sustainability through our packaging by using recycled materials. We always try to work with companies who share the same CSR principles as well. “

Mr. Bilbeisi - “One of the items that we are working on this season is recycled pomace, which is the residual of the product that we have. We are going to turn this product into animal feed. “

Mrs. Bilbeisi - “I think one of the most important thing from an environmental and sustainability point of view is the fact that in our mill we do not produce any wastewater, so we do not pollute the environment. We are always thinking about not only quality, but our impact on the environment and our consumption as well.

Every year we are implementing something new, we are always working to develop whether it is on the final product or efficiency, so it is always different every year. “



Mr. Bilbeisi - “Working within the CSR principles is not only for the company interest, because it`s one of the requirements in Europe markets, we should do something for the environment in return. “

Question - What can other companies do to apply CSR?

Mrs. Bilbeisi - “For us CSR regarding the environment is very important, for someone else that might not be the case. It might be working with local communities, for that, we also do work with nomadic families during the season. Obviously, we have our employees and CSR is incorporated with how we deal with our employees and people. It is specific to your

company and what is important to it. I think as we mentioned before, if you do not believe in what you are doing, then CSR will just become a buzzword.

During the season, we have had up to 60 nomadic families. Those families camp around the farm, and we supply them with water and electricity during the seasons. They do become part of the extended family and company. “

Mr. Bilbeisi: - “You have to be passionate about CSR, for instance, you have to look after your workers safety (safety comes first). Nobody wants to spend money on safety, but for us safety comes first. We are looking after our workers all the time. They are my sons and my brothers, this is how I treat them, and this is how I expect them to treat me in return. You have to let them understand that the farm's success depends on them; I just give them the tools. “

Mrs. Bilbeisi: - “Safety gears are an issue for the workers, therefore we try to make them understand the importance of the safety procedure, that the company implements. It is for their safety in the first place. It is moving slowly and until things become a habit, we try to do it slowly in different sections and we are always trying to improve.

We make our workers part of the decision. They see things that we are not capable of seeing and they can bring it to the table. They understand that, for example, whenever we finish a season, there will be a feast for everyone, because it is important for them to feel the benefits of all their hard work, specially that we are working throughout the whole year. We are very lucky in the fact that this year alone we won 29 international awards, in three continents. We are ranked 41 in the world, as producers. One of our varieties is ranked number two in the world. “

Mr. Bilbeisi: - “The workers have to understand why they are doing things, not just to do it; we sit down and tell them what we are going to do this coming season. In our business, what you do at the beginning of the season, and how you treat the trees, reflects the quality of the products. For example, “the person who is trimming the tree has to understand why it is done in a certain way so he can take pride in his work as well”

We implement the CSR, and at the end of the day, somebody in Europe will ask you what you have done to others, that is the whole point behind it. “

Mrs. Bilbeisi: - “Sustainability, literally means something that can carry on. Therefore, if you are not caring for your environment and the people you work with, it is not going to last, it is shortsighted.

I think that one of the beautiful things about our farm it is a barren land, so to have the opportunity to have this oasis and a sustainable environment. I think it is a very positive thing.
“

Mr. Bilbeisi: - “I will not depend on anyone I can do it myself. Nobody will do it for you, the government's purpose is to implement regulation not to produce new ideas, the good ideas come from the bottom up, not from the top down, and you have to do it yourself. “

Mrs. Bilbeisi: - “Some people think CSR is a buzzword, it is not, I think when you do the right thing, even if you just do a tiny bit, but it is the right thing to do, you will get the benefit in doing it in the future. Once you start positively treating the environment, the environment will give back to you.

I think you cannot have quality or harmony without respecting the environment. In addition, it is a beautiful country. We should treat it with that respect. “

