



Entrance to Daraghmeh family farm.

OLIVE OIL

FROM
THE DARAGHMEH FAMILY FARM
AL-LUBBAN ASH-SHARQIYA, WEST BANK

Palestine is considered the native home of the olive tree, and traces of the tree in Palestine date back six thousand years. The olive oil industry makes up 14 percent of the agricultural income of the Palestinian territories and supports the livelihoods of approximately 80,000 families.¹

The olive oil in this bottle was purchased directly from the Daraghmeh family farm, located about 20 kilometers south of the city of Nablus in West Bank, Palestine.

Conflict Kitchen visited with the family patriarch, Khalid Daraghmeh, and conducted the following interview.



Conflict Kitchen is a take-out restaurant that serves cuisine from countries with which the United States is in conflict. Each Conflict Kitchen iteration is augmented by events, performances, publications and discussions that seek to expand the engagement the public has with the culture, politics and issues at stake within the focus region.

The restaurant rotates identities in response to current geopolitical events.

Conflict Kitchen is funded primarily through food sales. Additional support comes from The Benter Foundation, The Sprout Fund and the Studio for Creative Inquiry.

www.ConflictKitchen.org / design by Brett Yasko

1. www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/10/2012102712652415500.html

Tell us about your farm.

My great grandfather lived here and bought the land during the Ottoman era. He planted olive trees, as did my grandfather, father and myself. I plant new trees from clippings off of the ancient olive trees my great grandfather planted. I currently have 380 big olive trees and 500 small ones. There is a saying in the Arab world: "They planted so that we can eat, and we plant so that our grandchildren can eat."

To plant olive trees, you need to look for a light soil in a rocky area. The tree doesn't need lots of water; it only needs a place to grow strong deep roots. The roots of this tree will feed from the rocks themselves, using minerals to build the strength of the tree. You get better olive oil if the tree is in a rocky area on the side of a mountain, where the water runs away from the roots. If you plant olive trees in a shallow area such as a valley, the olives will not be as good, and the yield of oil will be lower.

All of the family gathers to harvest the olives. Each family is working in their own field. If we see that other families do not have enough people to help them complete their harvest, we will assist them. This is a part of building community in Palestine.

We use this olive oil in everything, including all of our food. We use it to cook in the morning: to fry eggs and potatoes. The oil gives us energy and protects us from sickness. You can boil olive leaves to make medicine. The olive tree is holy; everything comes from it. I never go to the doctor because we are using and eating only natural food. My wife makes maftoul, couscous, hummus, fried potatoes, fried cornflower and fried eggplant. She makes everything herself with food from the land.

My grandfather used to tell us that the land is a treasure and that you will never be poor if you have the land; it will always keep you alive. He planted many different crops, including wheat, figs and grapes. Besides the olive trees, I have cinnamon, oranges, grapefruits, mandarins, nuts, figs, vegetables, tomatoes, corn and almond trees. I sell my goods on the side of the road or in the city.

Tell us about your village.

My village is ancient; it has existed since the Roman era. My village is not allowed to build or expand; however, Israeli settlements have expanded around our town, and they are now over ten times the size of my village. The first settlements began to appear in 1993 and now border other Palestinian villages.

The settlers want all of the land. If I left my land, they could confiscate it. I have been defending it for years. This has caused me lots of trouble, but I am still holding up. I've tried to build a wall and a fence around my house to protect my property, but the Israeli army wouldn't allow me. Every time I build, they come and knock my barriers down.

I used to have wooden doors and windows in my house. When the settlers started to attack us, they were breaking through them. Some people from the EU came and built iron doors to protect us from the daily harassment. I don't get any protection from the Palestinian government, and the Israeli army and courts are no use. The settlers have even poisoned my chickens and cows. Because of the attacks, the neighboring farmers ran away. I am the only one left. Then the internationals who put up our gate came and installed cameras as a way of documenting the attacks. We are not allowed to raise our hands to fight off the settlers—that is the law. You need to call the Israeli army to protect your own land.

How has the occupation affected your way of living?

I'm living off of the land because I don't have any other income; even if I did, we don't have a supermarket here. But it's difficult. The settlers and the Israeli army come and cut, burn and bulldoze our trees. I am challenging the occupation by living only off the fruits of my land. In this way, the land itself is empowering me to resist. For us, the olive tree is a symbol of our resistance because the trees can live for thousands of years. This is my father's and grandfather's land. I can give up everything—but not my land.

Thirty years ago, life was very safe and comfortable. We were under occupation, but it wasn't very noticeable. My father and grandfather were working, and the regulations weren't very strict. In the past twenty years, we have felt regulations increase. The occupation has squeezed us in all aspects of life: economically, socially, in everything.

We need goodwill. No one likes to have wars. We have been under Ottoman mandate, British mandate, Jordanian mandate, and nothing changed. But when Israel arrived, it changed everything. I am forty-seven years old, and the occupation is forty-seven years old. I am getting old; I am a grandfather; but still, I stay. My land is like a fish's water; without my land, I would die.