

BEST PRACTICES

SEKEM Farm for sustainable agriculture

Institutional information

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Summary

Explain your case in one or two sentences

The Sekem Initiative was founded in Egypt more than 40 years ago as a sustainable agricultural project. Today, “greening the desert” Today, “greening the desert” is one of the world’s largest sustainable agricultural project involving 20.000 small farmers with their families in Egypt and northern Africa. Support group and Sekem-affiliated projects exist in German, Austria and in the Netherlands.

Background information: How was the situation previous to your actions?

Before the project was started, the area north-east of Cairo was plain desert. Today, it is a multi-hectare area of sustainable agricultural production based on near-to-nature, holistic and “alternative” forms of agriculture. Central elements are educational programs for young farmers and their families, including social and cultural programs, schools, health-services, distribution, marketing and study-programs. The academic part of Sekem is represented by the Heliopolis University with appr. 4.000 students.

What were the needs you identified?

- *Need of water-management / ground-water management*
- *Need of intelligent use of natural resources*
- *Need of education on how to use fertilizers etc.*
- *Need of international affiliations and political links*
- *Need of cultural core-program to train young farmers*

What solution you found to cover those needs?

- *Core training program for young farmers including their families*
- *Information on links between nature, agriculture and sustainable use of resources*
- *Information on “circle of resources” and cradle-to-cradle principles in sustainable farming*
- *Use of composting and ancient farming techniques, use of cultural heritage knowledge*

What actions did you take to reach the solution?

- *Establish international partnership and support program*

- Establish large-scale educational training program for all levels of education (from non-education to academic level)
- Convince by “doing” (show that it works)
- High ethical standards
- “own” distribution channels

If any, which partners or other organisations did you involve during the process?

- Sekem Friends Germany, Netherlands, Austria
- DM and AllNatura as distributions channels
- Natural medical branch with herbal teas, infusions as pharmaceutical element
- Links to anthroposophical institutions in Europe
- GIZ and development agencies in northern Africa

What were the main problems or difficulties you had to face?

- In Egypt corruption, no understanding for change and “new old principles” of agriculture
- Reliable distribution channels for agricultural products as stable source of income
- Problems with authorities, regulations, laws and rules
- Financial shortcomings and lack of access to venture capital

What is the situation now, after your actions?

- One of the world’s largest organic farming projects with 70 hectares as standard operating size
- 100% organic
- Sustainable development report since 2007
- Alternative nobel prize and right livelihood award in 2003
- Food security project
- 20000 people involved in Sekem

Main lessons learned along the way? *

- International supports
- Reproductable standards of training, teaching
- Long-time plan or vision (i.e. Sekem 2050)
- Strong information campaigns
- Strong educational programs
- International affiliations

Annex:



#farmoffice02



#ecology03

