



 Cows in the Galilee.
Photo: Ilan Malester

Dairy Farms Go Green

The greening of Israel's dairy farms within just a few years is a major achievement, even by world standards

There are about 115,000 cows in Israel, producing about 1.15 billion liters of milk per year – an average of 10,500 liters of milk per cow. Yet while Israel's cows yield one of the highest rates of milk in the world, they are major polluters of the environment. It is estimated that one cow equals about 20 people in terms of potential water pollution by organic material (BOD) generated per day. The pollution generated by some 350,000 heads of cattle in Israel, including both milk and beef cows, equals the pollution generated by the entire human population of the country. Problems associated with dairy farms include soil and water source contamination by nutrients, nitrates, brines, organic matter and pathogens as well as stench, flies and aesthetic degradation.

Dairy Farm Reform: 1999-2004

In 1999, a reform package was initiated in the dairy sector, with the aim of encouraging dairy producers to become larger, more competitive and more efficient, on the one hand, and to prevent pollution, on the other hand. Within the framework of the reform, strict criteria were formulated for the environment-friendly operation of dairy farms, largely based on guidelines developed by the Ministry of the Environment. As part of the reform package, financial grants of 50% were provided for investments in infrastructure for the protection of the environment from cowshed wastes and leachates and 30% for investments in greater efficiency.

At the initiation of the reform project, there were 1,453 cowsheds in Israel. During the course of six

years (1999-2004), the following was achieved:

- The total number of dairy farms was reduced by 419 – from 1,453 to 1,034 – a 29% reduction.
- National milk production increased by 26 million liters – 2.5% – an addition equal to about 3,000 cows.

A Major Achievement

The reform project presented a golden opportunity to upgrade environmental infrastructures in dairy farms and to stop environmental pollution from this source. By the end of 2004, 97% of Israel's dairy farms had completed or were in the midst of undertaking environmental improvements – from infrastructure for the prevention of pollutant infiltration to prevention of manure, leachate and sewage overflow.

Environmental improvement of Israel's dairy farm sector is a major achievement, even by world standards. By the end of 2006, all of Israel's dairy farms will be environment friendly, constituting a model for a comprehensive solution to one of the most difficult problems associated with cattle raising in Israel.

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