



Colonial Occupation and Food Sovereignty in Palestine



What is Food Sovereignty?

The right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. This includes the right of peoples to control their food resources including land, water, seeds, pastures, animal and fish stocks.

For Palestinians, the struggle for food sovereignty is an integral part of their fight for self-determination and against military occupation. In 1948, **with the creation of Israel, Palestinians were dispossessed of 78% of their land.** The remaining 22% – now referred to as the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) have since 1967 been occupied by Israel, which controls natural resources, including land, water, seeds and fisheries. As a result, one third of Palestinians in the OPT, and two thirds in Gaza, are food insecure.

(this figure is now higher since the current war in Gaza).

Israel's agricultural warfare

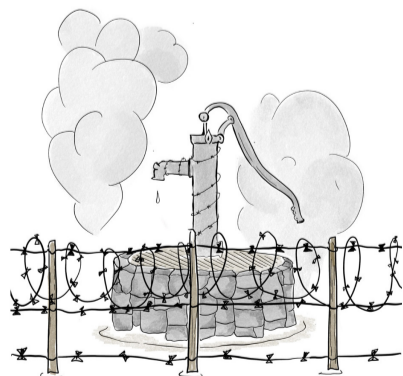
A multitude of Israeli tactics targeting Palestinian farmland and food security **wreck agricultural livelihoods** and can force farmers to abandon their lands completely. These include violent and continuous land grabbing (the seizing and theft of Palestinian property by Israeli settlers), the criminalization of harvesting Palestinian wild plants, and extreme restrictions on movement and land access – for Palestinians – in occupied territories. The examples we mention here hardly scratch the surface of the devastation inflicted on Palestinian lands.

Water apartheid

Before the occupation of Palestine, water was not a scarce resource. **Since 1967, Palestinian access to water has been controlled by Israeli authorities.** Palestinians are denied access to the Jordan River and fresh water springs; they are unable to drill new water wells, install pumps or deepen existing wells. Israeli pumping stations close to Palestinian villages – and illegal settlements – dry up Palestinian springs.

Israel even controls the collection of rainwater throughout most of the West Bank, and rainwater harvesting cisterns owned by Palestinian communities are often destroyed by the Israeli army.

Between 2012-2021, approximately 572 Palestinian water, sanitation, and hygiene structures in the West Bank were demolished by the occupation army. Israeli state-owned water company Mekorot controls the entire water grid of the West Bank – illegal settlements enjoy unrestricted access to water.



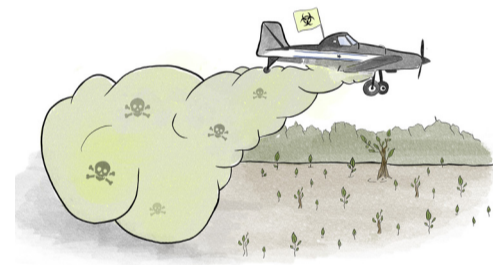
Fishing

The Palestinian fishing sector has almost completely collapsed under the Israeli occupation. **The Israeli army frequently attacks fishing boats in Palestinian waters.** Despite the Oslo Accords allocating 20 nautical miles off the coast of Gaza, fishermen that venture beyond 3-6 miles risk getting killed. *Currently all of the fishing boats and the port in Gaza have been destroyed by Israeli forces.*



Herbicide spraying

Since 2014, Israeli crop duster planes have been systematically spraying herbicides, including glyphosate, during harvest periods, often when the wind blows towards fertile lands in Gaza. This decimates Palestinian crops and creates chemical health hazards. Much of this spraying is done in Gaza along the Israeli military "buffer zone", which includes much of the fertile land in the Gaza strip. The spraying renders agricultural land both infertile and inaccessible to Palestinians. **Since the war in Gaza 2023-24 about 50% of the agricultural land has been destroyed.**



Settlement agriculture and exports

Some Palestinian farmers whose lands have been stolen or rendered infertile are forced to take jobs on settlement farms. Agriculture is the main source of income for Israeli settlements. **The EU, for example, imports 15 x more from illegal Israeli settlements than from Palestinians,** and most dates sold in the Netherlands are Israeli exports. Checkpoints, roadblocks and other mobility restrictions inflate transportation costs and further restrict Palestinian's ability to compete with Israeli goods. Exports from Gaza are almost completely banned, and imports restricted by the blockade. Israeli fruits and vegetables dominate Palestinian markets. Most Israeli produce is exported to the EU, and the produce that does not meet quality requirements – and which often greatly surpasses limits on chemical / pesticide content – is dumped into the Palestinian market.

Some seeds of Palestine's agricultural resistance Vivien Sansour's Heirloom Seed Library

This project tracks down Palestinian heirloom seeds – seeds that have been carefully selected and cultivated by indigenous people for hundreds or thousands of years. Since the occupation, policies targeting farmers are forcing them to abandon indigenous heirloom varieties in favor of varieties developed by Israeli seed companies. Tracking down, re-introducing and saving heirloom seeds is a method of resistance.



ISRAELI RESTRICTIONS ON PALESTINIAN FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AFFECT EVERY ITEM ON THIS TABLE

WATER

Israel controls West Bank water and routinely demolishes water infrastructure; Gaza water 97% contaminated

BLACK GOATS

Banned, seized, and slaughtered, 1950-2017, decimating subsistence base of Bedouin communities

MILK, EGGS

Israeli quota system restricts market share of Palestinian farmers in Israel (1948 territory); Israeli products dominate market in West Bank & Gaza

FISH

2,265 attacks by the Israeli navy on fishers in Gaza's restricted fishing zone, 2007-2021

Z'A'TAR, SAGE, 'AKOUB

Foraging banned; fines or prison time imposed

GRAPES, EGGPLANTS, TOMATOES, ONIONS

In West Bank, subject to restrictive military orders since 1980s; discriminatory policies harm farmers' ability to compete with produce from illegal Israeli settlements

TOMATOES, STRAWBERRIES

Israel controls all imports and exports; restricts Gaza produce from reaching markets

VEGETABLES

35% of Gaza farmland is inaccessible; 13,000 dunums damaged by herbicides

OLIVES

Up to 1 million olive trees uprooted by Israeli military since 1967; in 2021 settlers vandalized or stole harvest from 1,600 trees

MUSHROOMS

By holding up essential imports and charging port storage fees, Israel shut down a Palestinian mushroom farm in 2016

WHEAT, MILLET, BARLEY

Israeli-controlled imports are overtaking locally adapted varieties and reducing biodiversity



THE COLONIZATION OF PALESTINIAN AGRICULTURE

Under Israel's system of apartheid, Palestinian food producers face **expropriation of their land, forced displacement, denial of the right to water, denial of freedom of movement, attacks by Israeli military forces and settlers, and restricted access to markets**, leading to food insecurity and the destruction of generations of Palestinian agricultural heritage in the Fertile Crescent.

WHAT IS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY?

Food sovereignty, a pillar of environmental justice, is the **right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems**. Food sovereignty is key to ending hunger, food insecurity, poverty, and environmental harms perpetuated by colonialism and industrialized agriculture.



Israel: Starvation Used as Weapon of War in Gaza

Evidence Indicates Civilians Deliberately Denied Access to Food, Water and Farmland Destroyed

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Human Rights Watch report

The Israeli government is using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in the Gaza Strip, which is a war crime.

Israeli officials have made public statements expressing their aim to deprive civilians in Gaza of food, water, and fuel – statements reflected in Israeli forces’ military operations.

The Israeli government should not attack objects necessary for the survival of the civilian population, lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip, and restore electricity and water.

Bombing the objects necessary for survival

Alongside the crushing blockade, the Israeli military’s extensive airstrikes in the strip have resulted in widespread damage or destruction to objects necessary for the survival of the civilian population.

UN experts said on November 16 2023 that the significant damage “threatens to make the continuation of Palestinian life in Gaza impossible.” Notably, Israeli forces’ bombing of Gaza’s last operational wheat mill on November 15 ensures that locally produced flour will be unavailable in Gaza for the foreseeable future, as highlighted by OCHA. Additionally, the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) said that the decimation of road networks had made it more difficult for humanitarian organizations to deliver aid to those who need it.

Over half of Farmland destroyed - UN report

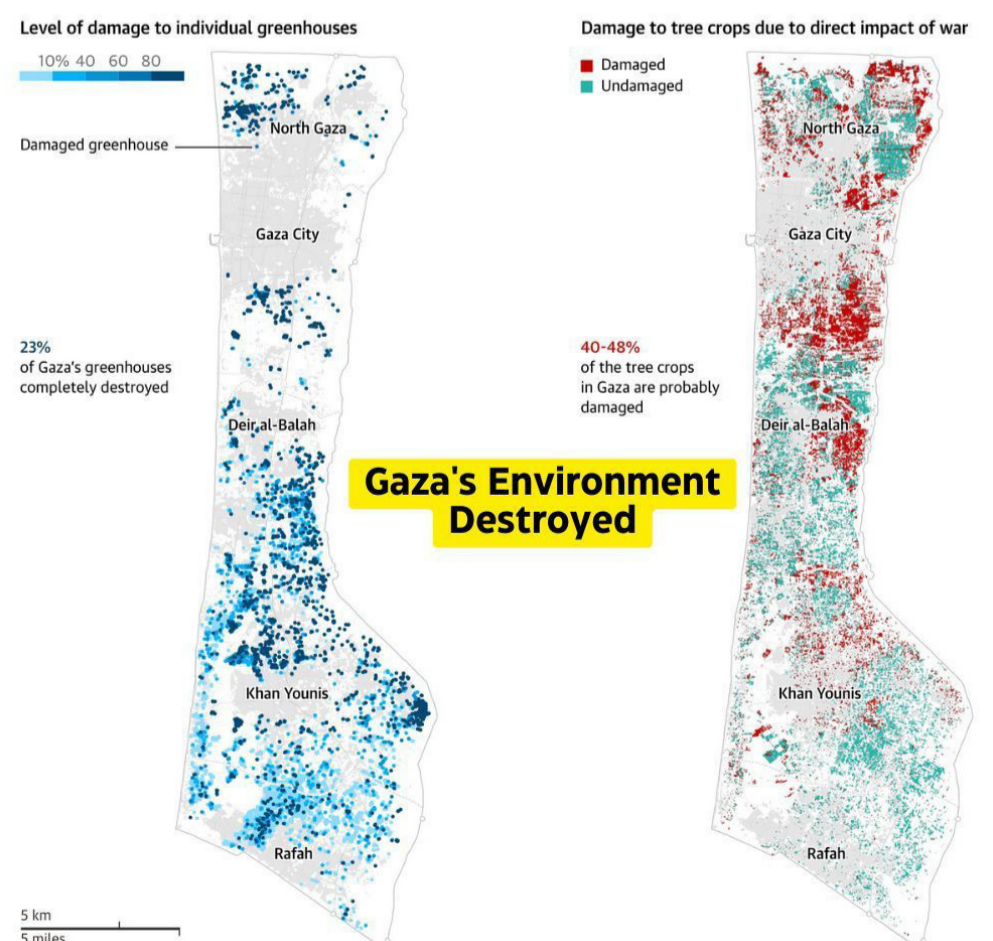
More than half of Gaza’s agricultural land, crucial for feeding the war-ravaged territory’s hungry population, has been degraded by Israel’s war, according to satellite images analysed by the United Nations.



The data reveals a rise in the destruction of orchards, field crops and vegetables in the Palestinian enclave, where hunger is widespread after eight months of Israeli bombardment. Satellite imagery from May 2017 to 2024 reveals that 57 percent of Gaza’s crop fields and arable lands essential for food security have significantly declined.

Almost 50% of tree crops in Gaza are probably damaged as a result of war

Damage to agricultural lands in Gaza from 7 October 2023 to 21 March 2024, by severity



“Bakeries and grain mills have been destroyed, agriculture, water and sanitation facilities,” Scott Paul, a senior humanitarian policy adviser for Oxfam America, told the Associated Press on November 23.



Seeds sown among Gaza rubble offer a small hope of food

Destroyed farmland

When Youssef Abu Rabie, a young agricultural engineer, returned to northern Gaza in March, his home had gone and his once flourishing farmland was completely destroyed.



After the fighting broke out in October, he had sought refuge from Israeli forces in Jabalia camp, north of Gaza City, and then near Al-Shifa Hospital, in western Gaza.

"The occupation forces ordered us to go to the south, but some of us returned to the north, motivated by the pursuit of renewed of hope in life," says Abu Rabie, one of 20 farmers now working together to grow food amid the rubble of



decimated homes, schools and hospitals in the city of Beit Lahia.

The food aid that reaches the Gaza Strip through checkpoints and airdrops is "nothing but a morsel", according to Abu Rabie.

Recycling seedlings

"We collected these small seedlings that we found and created what looked like incubators for them using plastic containers that were available on top of what was left of the rubble of our house, and we tried to take care of them as much as possible so that they could grow, with the aim of replanting them on agricultural land."

Farmers returning to their land

Palestinian farmers in the north of the Gaza Strip are risking their lives as they look to restore land destroyed in Israel's war on the besieged enclave.

The conflict forced farmers to leave their farms in Beit Lahia, near the border with Israel, for four months, but some have now returned to grow crops.



"I face challenges in replanting the farm, as most of the hose and water networks were damaged, and there is a shortage of fuel," Mr Al Mossalmani.

Since the start of the war, Beit Lahia has been the target of extensive Israeli shelling that has forced resident to flee, as well as destroying homes and farmland.

The farmers are aware of the risks of returning to his farm, as Israel continues its assault on Gaza "We will keep planting our lands as long as we are alive," said Mr Al Mossalmani.