Farmer, board member of the Palestine Fair Trade Association, village council member and mother of four, Bassema Barahmeh begins her day in Anza village at 4am. She’s a hard-worker who in addition to being a noted expert in hand-rolling maftoul, also produces organic Fairtrade olive oil, shells almonds, blends za’atar, and bakes pastries with other women to sell at local school canteens.

Located 450 metres above sea level, Anza is one of the most scenic villages in Palestine with breathtaking sea views on clear days, and the abundant plains that surround the mountain on which Anza sits are clothed in a semi-circle of green and golden colors depending on the season. Like many small villages in Palestine, Anza is proud of its agricultural and culinary heritage.

Bassema has 10 dunums (1 dunum is 1,000m²) of olive trees, producing around 300 litres of oil in a good year, some of which she sells to Canaan, keeping the rest for her family. Like other Anza farmers, she has benefitted from the use of Fairtrade premiums to buy tools and materials for harvesting.
Traditionally, families have been represented in the PFTA by the man of the household, but Bassem considered it important to join and sell olive oil from her family land independently of her husband. “I wanted the independence, and to see the results of my work. I’ve got a good reputation for my produce, and because I am proud of my work I want it to be in my name.”

Famous for being a village that values education for girls and young women, Anza’s women co-operative is one of the most active in the area and Bassem is their current co-ordinator. The women produce and sell two to three tonnes of maftoul to Canaan annually. Bassem is proud of their economic and social role: “As a Palestinian woman, I transfer these traditions to the next generation of women in order to preserve Palestinian culture and connect them with their heritage, and also to offer them the chance to be future leaders in the community”.

Bassem’s capacity for hard work is matched by her vision for empowering other women. Inspired by her involvement in fair trade and the opportunity it offers for long term financial security and sustainable work, she says: “Now I have an opinion. I have a say in this household and the community. I am a breadwinner and can make my own decisions. Even in my own household, I don’t have to wait for my husband’s permission, but can just go ahead and do things for myself. It has given me independence and raised my morale. My life has transformed.”

Visit Palestine

Every year, Zaytoun organises trips to Palestine for its supporters and customers. These trips are timed to coincide with the annual olive harvest in October.

www.zaytoun.org/plant_a_tree.html