Khader Khader is a farmer and board member of the Palestine Fair Trade Association, and lives in Nus Ijbeil, a small picturesque village near Nablus. The hills surrounding the village are lined with olive groves, many of which have been in the same families for generations. Today Khader enjoys a sustainable livelihood from producing and selling Fairtrade olive oil, but that hasn’t always been the case.

As a young man Khader struggled to make a living from agriculture and for 10 years he worked in a plastics factory in Israel. “I worked at night and slept during the day. I’d stay away for one to three months to earn money to bring home. It was something we had to do because the borders could close any time, and then nobody can leave or enter. I worked at the plastics factory for years, but once I got married I couldn’t leave my family for months at a time.”

Khader returned to the tradition of cultivating olive trees but at that time could only get 7 or 8 shekels for 1kg of olive oil, which was under the cost of production. Sometimes a trader would take Khader’s olive oil to Israel to sell and then disappear without ever paying him. Searching for a way to overcome these challenges, Khader became one of five founding members of a new co-operative in his village, set up in 2006 with the support of the newly formed Palestine Fair Trade Association. “I wasn’t sure about Fairtrade but often we couldn’t sell the oil and we had up to 40 large tins (17 litres each) just sitting in the house.”
Zaytoun supports an olive tree planting project which is run by the Palestine Fair Trade Association (PFTA). The PFTA farmer coops produce the olive oil, maltouf, almonds and freekeh which Zaytoun sells.

Farmers interested in participating in the project apply through Palestine Fair Trade Association coordinators. Allocations based on the following, a farmer must:

- Own land suitable for the number of trees applied for
- Demonstrate capacity to care for and nurture trees
- Be ready to prepare land for a collective tree planting day. All trees must be planted on the day they are delivered.

Priority is given to farmers who:

- Have lost trees to Israeli military or settler destruction
- Farm small areas
- Are women landowners interested in farming
- Young starter farmers who have inherited or acquired land

£20 pays for 5 olive tree saplings (3 years old) to be planted in Palestine. Contact us (details below) to participate.

www.zaytoun.org/plant_a_tree.html

In the first season Khader saved enough money to buy a tractor. This in turn extended his livelihood because he was able to offer services to other farmers, from ploughing their lands, delivering manure to their trees to harvesting their crops.

Now Khader also rents olive groves from other farmers and makes a point of helping other farmers. “Our village is small, most young people have left and the farmers that are still here are mostly older folks. I have to help. I profit for sure but my village is also my family. During the olive harvest, we all help each other. My father, my friends, my wife, there are always more people ready to help than not.” Like other Fairtrade farmers, Khader has benefitted from the use of Fairtrade premiums to buy tools and materials for harvesting.

Nus Ijbeil has a reputation for good fruit trees and Khader is continuing that tradition by planting olive and almond saplings which he receives from the Trees for Life programme run by the PFTA. His mother loves the speciality Om al-Fahem almonds they grow and harvests them by hand in July and August. Um Khader says: “I wake up before dawn to pick the almonds. We peel off the dry green skin and lay them in the sun to dry for three to four days. These almonds are so healthy and tasty. I fry them and add them on top of rice, I use them when I make sweet dishes, and I love eating them just as they are, raw.”

Fair trade has given Khader’s family not only a sustainable livelihood but also the opportunity to contribute to their community, whilst keeping ancient traditions alive and offering younger generations an alternative to insecure employment as labourers.