Mohammed Ruzzi is the manager of the Palestine Fair Trade Association (PFTA) in Jenin, where he lives with his wife and two children. With a Masters in agricultural engineering and animal science, he has worked with the PFTA since 2011.

“I’m a morning person so my day starts at 5am with a cup of camomile with my best friend and wife Azza. We have two sons Ahmad and Laith and I’m close to my parents. Family is the most important thing to me.”

Mohammed grew up in Jenin but his family’s roots are in a village called Sobbareen, on the outskirts of Haifa. The village was destroyed in 1948 and his grandparents were forced to flee. His father was born later that month, on the way between Haifa and Jenin, under an oak tree. His family settled in a refugee camp, and his father went on to study veterinary science, becoming the first vet in Jenin.

Mohammed went to university in Iraq, and graduated just as the war broke out in 2003. Back at home, he pursued a growing interest in organic farming and he now works with farmers in 51 co-operatives to support regenerative farming in the Jenin and Nablus area. He oversees their organic farming programmes, manages the tree-planting scheme, and helps them tackle the challenges posed by climate change.

Like many Palestinians, Mohammed has a deep connection with olive trees and he remembers his grandfather telling him stories of his family’s olive trees in Haifa. “When armed gangs invaded the Palestinian villages in 1948, my grandparents decided to leave but my great-grandfather refused to be parted from his olive trees. Today, Mohammed works to nurture opportunities for olive, almond and wheat small-scale farmers. He has a particularly soft spot for olive trees: “I still dream of one day planting olive trees in my home town of Haifa”.

Mohammed Ruzzi
The Palestine Fair Trade Association

FACTS ABOUT THE PALESTINE FAIR TRADE ASSOCIATION

- 51 village co-operatives
- Located in Palestine’s West Bank
- Supplies almonds, maftoul, freekeh and olive oil to Zaytoun
- Planted 173,372 saplings through the Trees for Life programme since 2006.

www.zaytoun.org | 0207 832 1351 | contact@zaytoun.org

@ZaytounUK | @Zaytoun_CiC | @Zaytoun_CiC
Farmers interested in participating in the project apply through the Palestine Fair Trade Association coordinators. Allocations are based on the following, and 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
- 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
- Women landowners interested in farming
- Young starter farmers who have inherited or acquired land.

On the Zaytoun website you can donate £20 for 5 tree saplings (3 years old) to be planted in Palestine, and we also offer a gift set of a bottle of Zaytoun Fairtrade olive oil with a certificate of thanks for the donation of a tree.

www.zaytoun.org/plant_a_tree.html

The PFTA runs the Trees for Life programme, which distributes saplings to farmers each January and February, and since the programme began in 2006 over 170,000 trees have been planted in Palestine.

Olive trees are an intrinsic element of Palestinian identity, and they can come under threat from settler attacks and military activity. The Trees for Life programme aims to increase the number of olive trees in Palestine and support farming communities to continue to produce olive oil.

During the planting season, Mohammed is often out with farmers helping to distribute and plant the saplings. “Our conflict is about the land and the olive oil is a powerful tool that we can use to share our story. It’s a form of non-violent resistance,” explains Mohammed. “When people in other countries go into a shop and pick up a bottle of Palestinian olive oil, they will start to ask questions and hopefully find out more about our story.”

Farmers who struggle to access their land because of the occupation can apply for trees. “It’s important to keep planting trees on land that is under threat and it’s important that farmers continue to request the permits to access their trees. It is their land and they have a right to plant and tend their trees.”

The PFTA is also concerned about the impact of agriculture on climate change, and views the planting of olive trees as a contribution towards reducing the impact of carbon emissions. To ensure that the saplings conform to organic standards, the PFTA has supported the creation of a tree nursery, and this year the nursery supplied over 20,000 trees to farmers. This has been a significant improvement on the quality of saplings that are planted and will help maintain the quality of the olive oil. “It’s not easy to find a good source of trees. You might not know the source of the seed or it could be grafted but with the nursery, we have a trusted source,” explains Mohammed.

Zaytoun customers are long-standing supporters of Trees for Life and to date, they have donated over 64,000 trees.