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**OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR INCREASED QUALITY  
OF FRESH PRODUCE  
TO THE GULF COUNTRIES**

Prepared for

The Agricultural Marketing Development Project

Amman, Jordan

At the request of

The Jordan Exporters Association for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Prepared by:

Richard J. Peters

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# **OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCREASED QUALITY OF FRESH PRODUCE TO THE GULF COUNTRIES**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Agricultural Marketing Development Project (AMDP), with USAID and AMO approval, assisted the Exporters Association in the development of a multifaceted activity in the Gulf Countries to promote the idea of the availability of high quality vegetables, fruit and flowers from Jordan.

Activities included participation in the Dubai Spring Fair, a Trial Marketing Shipment, and an Importer Contact Trip. The Executive Director of the Exporters Association, Maha Shawareb, managed the Association stand with full cooperation from Mohamed Izzat and his group as well as with the help of Imad Yaseem of AMO.

The importer contact group, led by Tala't Dougmush, included 6 members of the Exporters Association as well as a representative of the Wholesale Market Syndicate. Four countries were visited by the group including the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain. The four countries were visited over a ten-day period.

Extensive, preliminary conclusions are presented.



**PHOTO #1.** Tala't Dougmush served as "chairman" of the Jordanian delegation to the Gulf Coast. In that capacity, he was very conscientious about schedules, airline reconfirmations, and payment of group bills, etc.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Gulf Coast Activity comprises three specific activities-participation in the International Spring Trade Fair in Dubai; a Trial Marketing Shipment and an Importer Contact Trip. This report will describe the development and performance of the Trade Fair and the Trial Marketing Shipment, and it will provide a detailed account of the Importer Contact Trip.

Nine Jordanians participated as a result of some financing from AMDP. These include Imad Yaseem, AMO-PHT; Maha Shawareb, Executive Director of the Exporters Association; Six members of the Association including Tala't Doughmush, Nabil Rajibi, Khalil Masalha, Walid Khateeb, Arif Jweiha, Abdul Rahman Abu Nuwar; and, Nabil Atiyeh from the Wholesale Market Syndicate.

The objective of this Gulf Coast Activity is to demonstrate the utility of providing top quality fresh produce to the Gulf markets.



**PHOTO #2. Jamil Zureigat, AMDP Director; Mohamed Fara', PHT Director and Tala't Dougmush visited the Haddadin packing plant to observe preparation of product for the Fair as well as for the Trial Marketing Shipment.**

## II. OBSERVATIONS

### A. Fair

Product for the exhibition and the trial marketing shipment were provided as a contribution from several members of the Association. Contributors included Yousuf Barakat, Mazen Odeh, and Hassan Abu Sido. Products provided included green capsicum, cucumbers, tomatoes, green beans, broad beans, carrots, beets, asparagus, red cabbage, oranges [from Lebanon]. The produce selected was collected, sorted and prepared for air shipment by Karim Haddadin at his packing house. Approximately one metric ton of produce was provided, and the pallets were flown to Dubai on the same plane as the participants. Nabil Rajibi and his associates in Dubai, Al Khalil Trading Co., collected the pallets on arrival, cleared them through customs and delivered them to the Exhibition and to cold storage at Al Khalil Trading Co.



**PHOTO #3.** Tomatoes were selected for uniformity both in size as well as in color. These were labelled with Association logo stickers.

The Government of Jordan's Export Development and Commercial Centers Corporation (JEDCO) organized and managed the Jordan pavilion in the Dubai International Trade Fair. The space provided to the Association was a prime space with excellent exposure to the visitor traffic. Nabil Rajibi and Mohamed Izzat participated with the Association to make a joint exhibit of top quality vegetables and flowers from Jordan [Flowers from Jordan's Fresh Cut Flower Association



**PHOTO #4.** Various members of the team ponder layout of the Association stand upon arrival at the Fair premises in Dubai. Many ideas were expressed, and Maha Shawareb had the responsibility to consider these as she quietly led the group in assembly of the layout.

also sent flowers, but word of their arrival was only received by Imad Yaseem on March 20. Imad managed to clear the flowers, but, following Awamleh's instructions, refused to pay for clearance. The clearing company permitted display of the flowers, but retained possession]. AMO's representative, Imad Yaseem provided a table with brochures from Jordan's fresh produce sector as well as various videos representing activities in the fresh produce sector. Mr. Yaseem was also helpful in the management of the display as an assistant to Maha Shawareb.

Assembly of the fresh produce display turned out to be a joint activity of all the above named participants, including flower producer and exporter Mohamed Izzat, his wife and two additional assistants from his company. The group arrived at the exhibition after a brief sleep following an early morning arrival from Amman. The group returned in the late afternoon to transform a barren pavilion space that became, by 2200 hours, a magnificent representation of the bounteous potential of Jordan's fresh produce sector.

The fair opened to the public at 1000 hours on Saturday, and the entire delegation was present to see that the stand was even more attractive than the night before because of some further work by Izzat's team in putting together beautiful floral displays.



PHOTO #5. The entire Jordanian delegation participated in assembly of the Association layout.

Saturday afternoon's crowds were impressive, and there were a number of comments focussed on the quality of the fresh produce presented-"I don't believe the products are from Jordan" and, "The produce is plastic".

#### **B. Trial Marketing Shipment (TMS)**

The Trial Marketing Shipment aspect of the Activity got off to a slow start. Rajibi's group, Al-Khalil, said that the approach advocated, market promotions in supermarkets, would not work. The point is, however, that Al-Khalil is a wholesaler and not involved in market promotion. We were able to identify a major supermarket chain, Spinneys, and approached one of their stores. There are 4 Spinney outlets in Dubai; two in Sharjah; and, two in Abu Dhabi. We met with the Retail Operations Manager in the Almeira store. He expressed an interest in receiving Jordanian quality products, but only after domestic production is finished at the end of May. They are, in addition, interested in grapes. They said, however, that their impression of Jordanian grapes was that they were not of sufficient quality. We assured him that several growers are exporting to Sainsbury's and other British markets. They were also interested in flowers. In every case, they are desirous of top quality, continuity of production and prices. Spinney has tomatoes from Holland; pre-cut vegetables from California, and other high quality items. We were hoping they would be willing to accept Jordanian product at this time on a demonstration basis, but Wright said they would only do so when they were developing a long-term relationship.



**PHOTO #6.** Nabil Afieh took special pride in the assembly of basket displays of Jordan's top quality vegetables.

On the last day of the Importer Contact Group in Dubai, the Al Khalil Trading Co. indicated they could display the Jordanian product in a Sharjah Supermarket owned by a Lebanese friend of Kamal Abu Ali. This was to be initiated on Tuesday, March 21. Al Khalil also said they have an ongoing relationship with Spinney and could arrange for demonstrations at their stores at the appropriate time. Haddadin quoted prices for the TMS products to Al Khalil, and they will deal with the Lebanese Supermarket in Sharjah.

We also met with Fayez M Ahmed of Al Fajer Information and Services to initiate exploration of how to develop a comprehensive strategy to market top quality Jordanian product in the gulf.

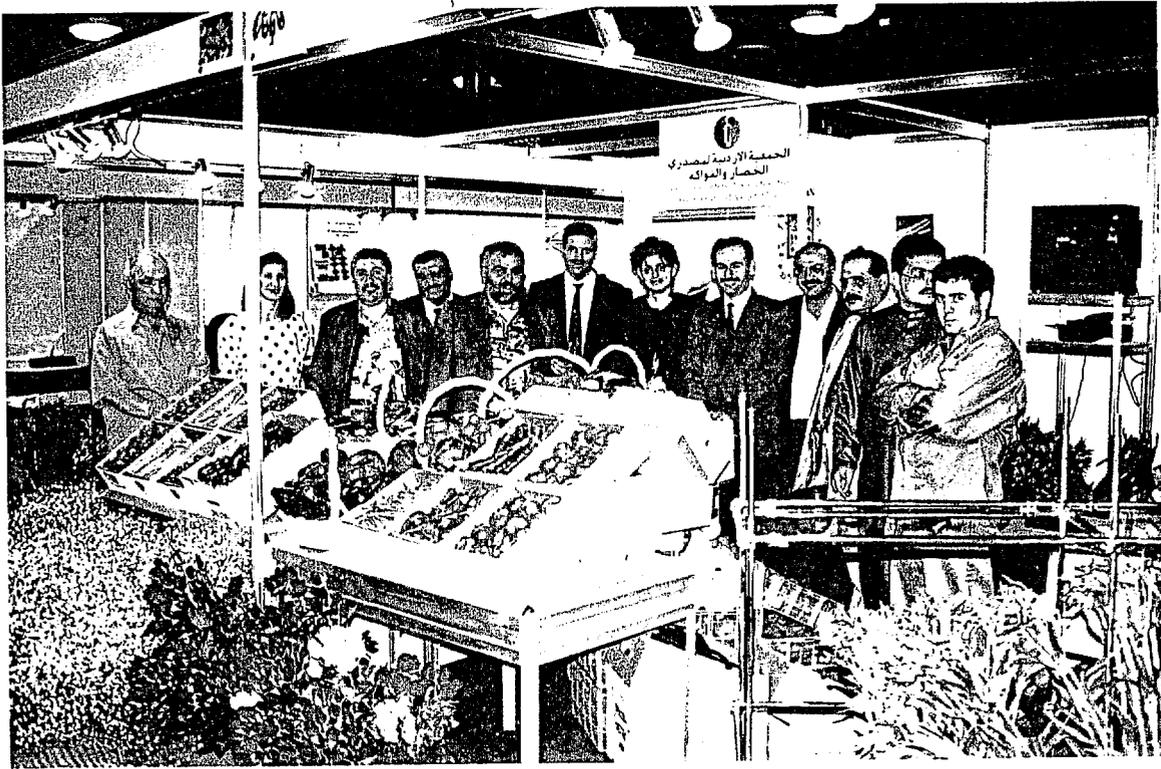


PHOTO #7. Mohamed Izzat, Tajat Baw, Tala't Dougmush, Khalid Masalha, Nabil Atieh, Abdul Rahman Abu Nuwar, Maha Shawareb, Imad Yaseem, Nabil Rajibi, Walid Khatib, Sameer Essa, and Jamal Essa all are proud of their participation in assembly of the Jordanian Association's stand at the Dubai Fair.

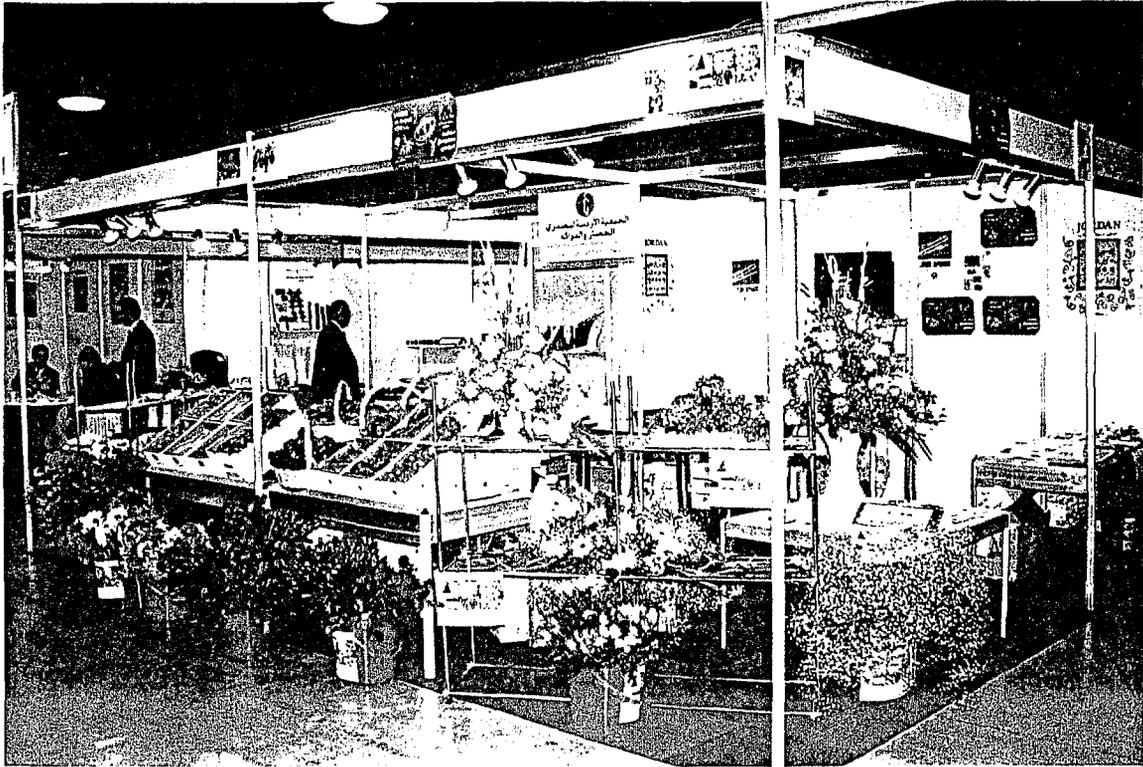
### C. Importer Contact Trip

#### 1. Dubai

Importer contact meetings in Dubai were initiated on Saturday. An interesting meeting was held with the General Director of Dubai's Chamber of Commerce, Abdul Rahman G. Al Mutaiwee. A main point raised with the COC was the issue of multiple entry visas for Jordanian truck drivers. The General Director was receptive to this problem, and he requested a letter from the Association endorsed by the Jordanian Consulate. He also advocated consideration of an alternative to truck transportation with refrigerated shipment by sea. Dubai's Jebel Ali Seaport has cold storage of approximately 40,000 cubic meters.

The General Director also provided us with detailed statistics of trade between Dubai and Jordan.

We made several visits to the Wholesale Market, having meetings with Rajabi and his associates in Al Khalil Trading Company offices. We also observed the 1600 hour daily opening of refrigerated trucks. There were a significant number of trucks from Jordan. More important, it was easy to spot the Jordan produce upon unloading. Much of it was packed in styrofoam boxes,



**PHOTO #8.** On opening day the stand was even more beautiful due to the flower arrangements done by Mohamed Izzat's staff.

very often the product was damaged, and some of it had begun to rot. The product is off-loaded onto the pavement without shade. Product is off-loaded according to daily demand, and sometimes trucks will remain at the wholesale market for as long as 3 days.

## 2. Oman

We arrived in our Oman hotel at about 0200 hours. The lateness of the hour impacted on our first meeting in that several members of the group were late in getting to the bus for the trip to the Oman Chamber of Commerce. We arrived about 15 minutes late, and we were received by a group of about 13 business and government people.

Our meeting lasted for about an hour and 15 minutes and dealt mainly with how agriculture is managed in Jordan. It appears that the Omani group is mainly interested in possible transfer of technology from Jordan to Oman, and particularly with regard to management.

Omanis purchase most of their imported fruit and vegetables through the Dubai market. The total population of Oman is approximately 2 million with about 50% expatriate. The oil boom has created a top layer buying power with a quality conscious nature



**PHOTO #9.** We observed a daily 1600 hour opening of newly arrived refrigerated trucks from Jordan. Here, cauliflower is being off-loaded.

Local vegetables dominate the market from December to May. There is a significant quantity of imported fruit. We visited one local market housed in an open sided warehouse. Most, if not all, the traders were Indian.

Some of the team members expressed the view that the Association should ship a truck container to Oman for a trial marketing shipment. A sample was sent to Muscat from Haddadin in care of the Jordanian Embassy. Louai T. Ayoub, Commercial Attache in Muscat managed to clear the shipment with the help of Bader Ja'aouni, Mushrif Enterprises and Trading LLC.



**PHOTO #10. The Spinney Fresh Produce Manager in Almeira, Dubai, showed us the fresh cut produce they import from California.**

Eventually, the group decided to place the samples at a small super market at Al Hooti Commercial Centre. The group stopped briefly the following day. The entire lot of vegetables had been sold, and the manager said he would take produce at any time. This exercise in Oman along with the TMS to Dubai produced several observations:

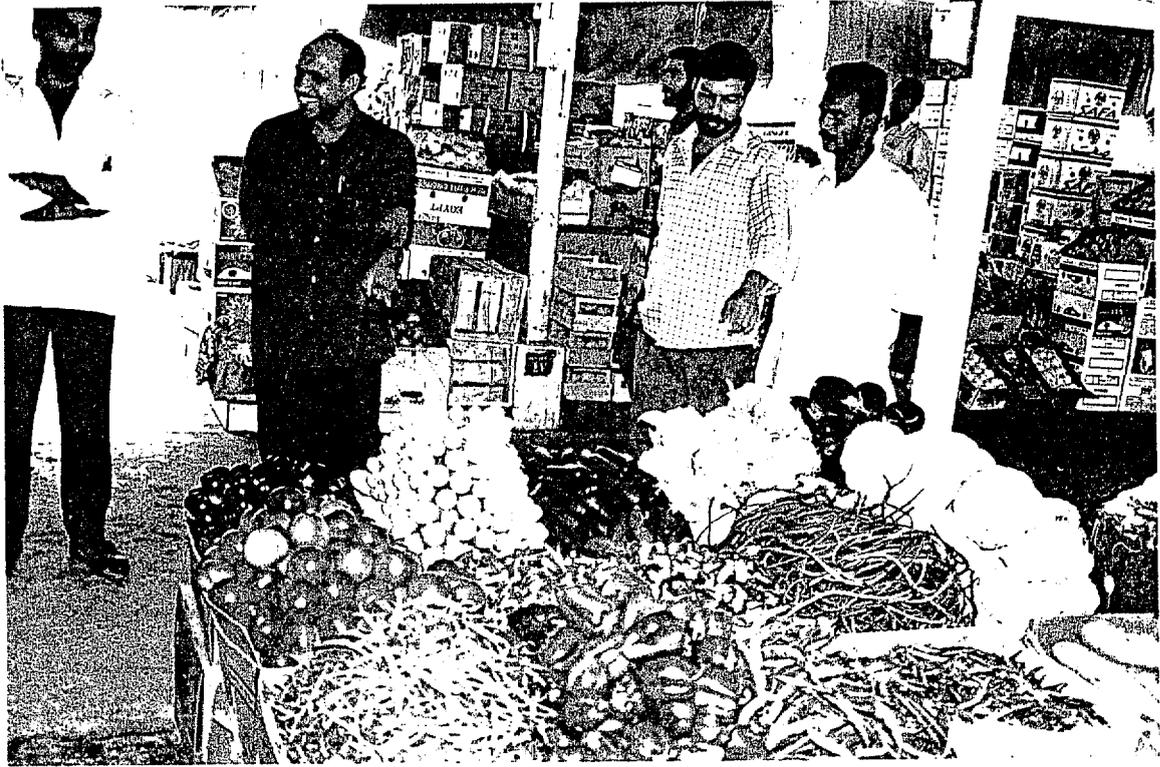
1. Market promotion must be done in an organized and sequential fashion.
2. The first step is advance contact with commercial outlets that are interested in receiving the product.
3. Once agreement is reached the timing for the promotion is important in terms of when local produce will not compete and when Jordan is ready and able to produce.
4. Hand's on training for several Jordanians is suggested. This could possibly be with such an entity as the California Table Grape Commission, Lindemanns and others.
5. A focus on grapes may be a good idea if planning can be initiated immediately.



**PHOTO #11.** It was in Muscat that I finally found what I wanted in terms of market promotion. Hopefully, in the future, we can do this type of promoting for quality of Jordanian fresh produce.

We visited the "AMO" of Oman. After a briefing at the headquarters, they showed us their major collection and distribution center just next to their offices; a quality control laboratory; and, their largest selection and packaging plant along with considerable cold storage space. In addition, they have a considerable fleet of refrigerated vehicles for short and long distance delivery. There appears to be some talk of privatizing this Government operation since it is costing the Government a considerable amount of money. Problem is that the private sector is not particularly interested in buying the Government facilities.

Our last meeting was with the Chamber of Commerce. Apparently, this organization is providing



**PHOTO #12.** Local fresh produce in Muscat is available from December through May. Note that most of the marketing people are Indian.

most of the impetus for privatization of the above mentioned agency. They are also quite interested in the possibility of a joint venture with Jordan. A joint venture would require an investment of 150,000 rials or \$441,000. A totally foreign investment would require capital of 500,000 rials or \$1,570,000.

### **3. Qatar**

Our first meeting in Doha was with the Chamber of Commerce. In contrast to Muscat, this meeting was very warm, and it was clear that there is a strong, good political relationship between Jordan and Qatar. The first speaker was a bit nationalistic in the sense of Arab unity saying the Arabs should stick together. Apparently, Qatar has attempted to ship products to the European market, but was ignored because it was not considered possible that quality could be produced in Qatar.

Qatar has no restriction against fresh produce imports from Jordan-even though there is a small amount of local production. Jordan supplies about 60-70% of the fresh produce into Qatar. Qatar will require standardization of packaging material and labelling. Qatar wants low cost product because of the requirements of its Asian population.



**PHOTO #13. Tala't Dougmush arranges the Egg Plant for sale at a Muscat Supermarket in Oman. All the products shown were sold overnight!**

Qatar recently acquired 3 Russian built cargo planes. These are being used to supply fresh produce from Egypt, Sudan, Turkey and possibly elsewhere.

It was suggested that Jordan organize an exhibition to show neighboring countries what is being produced.

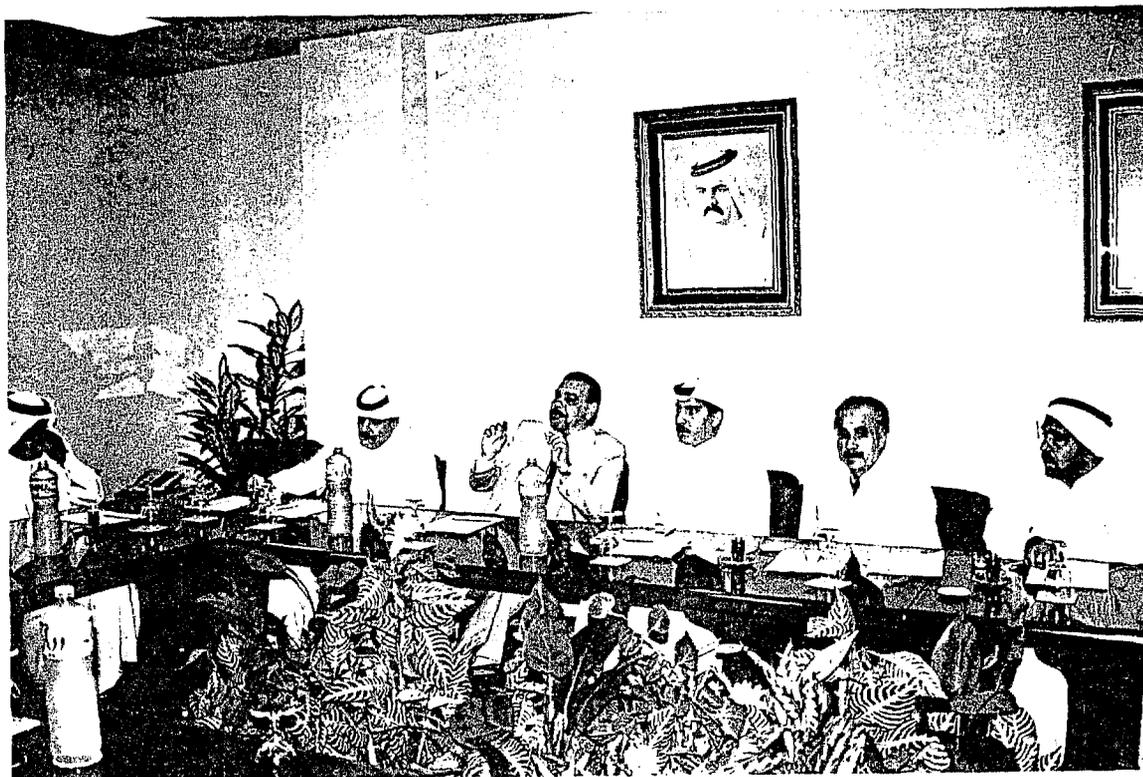
They mentioned that Jordanian exporters compete against each other in the Qatar market. Some Jordanian exporters are known as "bulldozers" in that they come in and drop the price to eliminate competition.



**PHOTO #14.** The head of Oman's Agricultural Marketing Organization sports a silver dagger as do many high level officials in that country.

There are two auctions in Doha that sell fresh produce. We visited one of these offices managed by Adawiya. They say Qatar has a free market, but the government will intervene if prices go too high.

The Faisal Family Food Centre is the largest single distributor in Qatar. They are interested in frozen vegetables. They import top quality of a big variety of commodities from Holland. This is an advantage because they can rely on constant supply and quality. This company supplies the palace with food



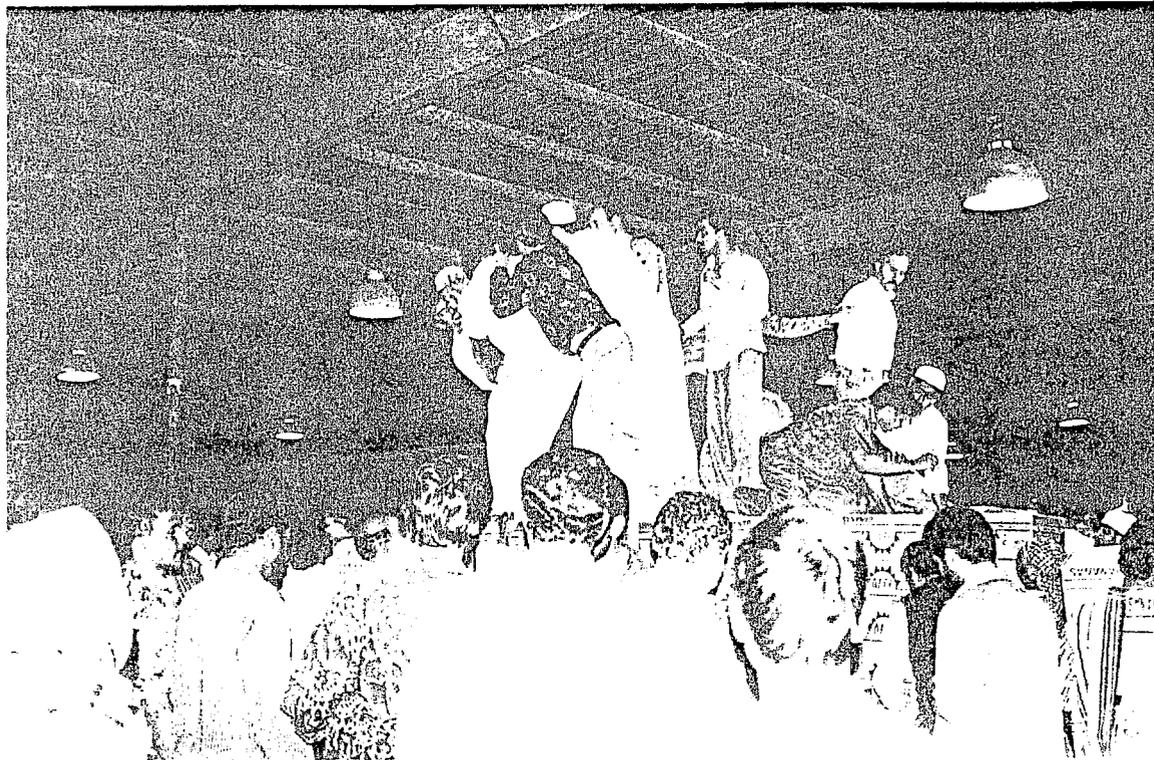
**PHOTO #15.** The Importer Contact Team met with the Chambers of Commerce in all four countries visited. Here is shown a meeting with the Doha, Qatar chamber of commerce.

A new gas project is expected to require 10,000 new families next year. [According to an official from the Qatari Government, this project will supply gas to various countries of Asia. Currently, Japan is building 7 super-tankers to transport the anticipated gas supply. They also are discussing the possibility of a pipe distribution system to the United Arab Emirates.]

The auction could possibly supply weekly or even daily prices to Amman. Adawiya is the man to deal with on this issue. A person named Jehad Edrees (974-887-400) would be the person to actually supply the information. Qatar Auctions Company, PO Box 2006.

We visited the auction, which is scheduled for 2000 hours every evening except Friday. Two large shelters are dedicated to the auction. One is for local produce, and the second for imported produce. The auction process is a fairly chaotic process with auctioneers standing on the boxes of produce, sometimes being pushed and shoved and even falling off. It appeared that some product was damaged in the process. Jordanian team members observed that the record keeping in the auction process is dishonest in that product quality is not accounted for. A further note of interest is that intermediaries in the wholesale market take a 2.5-3.0% commission plus a "traditional" one out of 10-20 boxes, plus an additional 5% for the agent. The total charge, then, varies between 15.5 to 22% of the wholesale price.

The quality of the Jordanian product at the Qatar market was distinctively higher than that



**PHOTO #16.** It's a difficult life for auctioneers in the Doha Market. Auctioning begins at 2000 hours. Here, there is intense interest in the final price of imported bananas.

observed at the Dubai market. Packaging, however, was the same as that seen in Dubai. There is an extensive network of resident Jordanian businessmen involved in the fresh produce business. An interesting example is a former professor of management from Yarmouk University. Ibrahim S Adawiya manages one of the two auction companies in the wholesale market. The second auction company entertained us for dinner in a pre-fabricated house imported from the United States down to the detail of a painting from Pennsylvania's Amish country side.

#### **4. Bahrain**

Our first meeting in Bahrain was at the Bahrain Wholesale Market with the company of Abu Jalil Essa Al Khor. Walking into the market we saw some produce from Jordan in the styrofoam boxes. We noted that Saudi Arabia ships to the Bahrain market in similar styrofoam. We also saw Rajibi and Dougmush citrus from Lebanon in the market.

The local season of production will end in late April. Currently, Jordan is sending about 6-7 trucks per day into this market. During the summer season Jordan sends in about 15-20 trucks per day. Jordan is the major supplier to Bahrain. Some 20 trucks per day go from Bahrain to Kuwait.



**PHOTO #17.** In a Bahrain supermarket we saw Dutch green capsicum for 3.000 BD as compared to the same quality green capsicum from Jordan at 0.600 BD.

We were too late to see the auction process. Produce is sold directly when prices fall. When asked about who are the good shippers from Jordan several names were mentioned including Hamdi Hamdan Abu Zneimeh, Abdul Mawla, Hamam Shawa and Hab Fahoori.

One company met us in the Chamber of Commerce, General Trading and Food Processing. They average about 30-35 trucks per month from Jordan. This is a partially government held company, and their role has been to mitigate prices to the consumer. The company is now in the process of privatization. They import from all over the world, and they have large cold storage facilities.

Apparently, produce from Jordan must be checked for drugs, arms and other nefarious items both at the border with Saudi Arabia as well as at Bahrain's Free Zone. This means off-loading into the sun and heat. Off-loading and re-loading is done by hand.

This company imports about 6 metric tons per week by air from Holland. Products imported from Holland include mushroom, asparagus, cherry tomato, beef tomato, chinese cabbage, red capsicum, leeks, etc. While prices are higher, the Dutch source provides the advantage of a constant supply of top quality. Strawberries are imported from Egypt and from Morocco with imports also coming from the United States.



**PHOTO #18.** In the same supermarket, Dutch tomatoes were selling for 2.500 BD versus Bahraini tomatoes at 0.350 BD.

The Government controls prices based on wholesale prices. Price differentiations are made according to the country of origin so that the price allowed for a product from Holland may be higher than the same product from Jordan. In one supermarket, for example, we observed green bell peppers from Jordan being sold for .6 BD in comparison to the same peppers from Holland at 3.5 BD.

Each country of the GCC, according to the COC, has a specific protocol with Jordan. These protocols are subject to negotiation.

### **III. CONCLUSIONS**

There are a number of tentative and more firm conclusions that can be drawn from this trip. These conclusions will be segregated according to the main topics in the report.

#### **I. Fair**

- a) A combined effort between various members of the Association, including a major Jordanian flower exporter, resulted in a beautiful portrayal of Jordan's quality potential.

- b) The Association should only participate in fairs when that activity can be joined with trial marketing shipments as well as importer contact trips.
- c) As much as possible, the Association should seek to participate in fair activities managed by JEDCO.
- d) All future fair activities should place absolute priority on the top quality available from Jordan.

## **2. Trial Marketing Shipment (TMS)**

- a) The trial marketing component requires a great deal of pre-planning in order to be truly effective.
- b) A strategy for improving the image of Jordanian products should be developed in coordination with a knowledgeable promotion and advertising person or entity based in Dubai or elsewhere in the Gulf Countries.
- c) Produce selected for TMS should be selected on the basis of availability of a constant, high quality supply.
- d) The objective of the TMS should, first, be quality, and, second, Jordan.
- e) Hands on training in TMS should be considered.

## **3. Importer Contact Trip**

- a) Investigate the feasibility of a joint venture to develop an adequate wholesale market space in Dubai so that Jordan's produce can be handled in a quality manner.
- b) Investigate feasible transportation alternatives from Jordan to the Gulf Countries. If truck transportation through Saudi Arabia is the only feasible alternative, the possibility of developing an adequate, refrigerated examination facility at the border should be considered. It would be better, of course, if improved political relationships with Saudi Arabia would permit passage without having to unload and re-load the contents.
- c) Individual protocols between the various countries of the GCC and Jordan need to be reviewed by the Association for possible re-negotiation.
- d) Continued political volatility in the Middle East means that Jordan should continue to try and diversify its marketing systems. While every effort should be made to serve the GCC more adequately, markets in SE Asia, Eastern Europe, Russia and

Western Europe also need to be developed.

- e) The Association should promote the development of strong, vertically integrated companies that could facilitate a & b. Vertically integrated companies could compete with Holland, for example, in sourcing products from various sources in order to supply markets with year-round supply.

V. CONTACTS

Abu Ali, Jamal Essa, Emirates Int. Global Trading Co.  
Tel: 971-4-668-611, 664-420  
Fax: 669-081  
PO Box 3966, Dubai, UAE

Abu Aly, Sameer Essa A., Al Khalil Trading Co.  
Tel: 664420, 668611  
Fax: 669081  
PO Box 3966, Dubai, UAE

Adawiya, Ibrahim S., Faisal Bin Jassim Bin Faisal Al Thani  
Head Office  
Tel: 974-445-065  
Fax: 447-189  
PO Box 6  
Doha, Qatar

Ahmed, Fayez M., Al Fajer Information and Services  
Managing Director  
Tel: 971--4-621-133, 622-801 (DIR), 050-644-3353  
Fax: 622-802  
PO Box 11183 Dubai, UAE

Al Akhzami, Saif Said Saif, Saif Said Saif Al Akhzamie Trading Est.  
Managing Director  
Tel: 968-645-123  
Fax: 645-522  
PO Box 7, Wilayat Quryat, Hail Al-Ghaf  
Postal Code 120  
Sultanate of Oman

Al Dolaimi, Nasser M., Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry  
Manager Public Relations and Commercial Information  
Tel: 974-425-131, 425-239  
Fax: 447-905  
PO Box 402  
Doha, Qatar

Al Dosari, Yousef M.  
Doha Auctions Co. Ltd.  
Tel: 974-881-321, 885-774  
Fax: 882-490  
PO Box 268777  
Doha, Qatar

Al Hasani, Ali Bin Hamed, Hamed Abdulla Enterprises  
Tel: 968-693-459, 693-759  
Fax: 600-673  
PO Box 3723, Ruwi, Postal Code 112  
Sultanate of Oman

Al Hashar, Faisal K. The Public Authority for Marketing Agricultural Produce  
Director General  
Tel: 968-591-540, 591-630  
Fax: 591-551  
PO Box 3510, Ruwi, Postal Code 112  
Sultanate of Oman

Al-Idreesi, Ayman R., National Drip Irrigation Co.  
Tel: 672-209, Factory 737-897  
Fax: 698-248  
PO Box 2997, Amman, Jordan

Al Khor, A. Jalil Essa  
Haji A. Jalil Essa Al Khor & Sons  
Tel: 253-348, 241-076  
Fax:  
PO Box 20187  
Bahrain

Al Malki, Majed A., Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry  
Director General  
Tel: 974-351-491, 425-131  
Fax: 324-388  
PO Box 402  
Doha, Qatar

Al Mutaiwee, Abdul Rahman G., Dubai Chamber of Commerce  
Director General  
PO Box 1457, Dubai, UAE  
Tel: 971-4-237-533, 224-651  
Fax: 211-646

Al Mutawa, Hamad Abdulla, Ministry of Agriculture  
Asst. Deputy Minister  
Tel: 971-4-229-841  
Fax: 232-781  
PO Box 1509, Dubai, UAE

Al Nimer, Rima Ghadian, Consulate General of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan  
Counsel  
Tel: 971-4-517-500  
Fax: 524-675  
PO Box 2787, Dubai, UAE

Al Omari, Hussein Salem, Emirates Bank International Limited  
Senior Account Manager, Special Accounts Section  
Tel: 971-4-256-256, 263-830 (DIR)  
Fax: 267-120  
PO Box 2923, Dubai, UAE

Al Thani, Abdulla A., Ministry of Energy and Industry, Dept. of Industrial Development  
Director  
Tel: 832-101, 832-121  
Fax: 832-024  
PO Box 2599  
Doha, Qatar

Allawati, Qasim Bin Habib, Jannat L.L.C. Agricultural & Trade Services  
Executive Director  
Tel: 968-696-256  
Fax: 604-679  
PO Box 484 Al Harthy Complex Postal Code 118  
Sultanate of Oman

A'Shuraiqy, Mohamad Nasir, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry  
Director, President's Office  
Tel: 968-789-564  
Fax: 792-359  
PO Box 1400 Ruwi, Postal Code 112  
Sultanate of Oman

Ayoub, Louai T., Embassy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan  
Commercial Attache  
Tel: 968-785-193  
Fax: 786-349  
PO Box 2281, 112 Ruwi  
Sultanate of Oman

Barmawi, Mohammad K., Jordan Vegetable Oil Industries Co. Ltd.  
Int. Marketing and Export  
Tel: 696-348  
Fax: 696-349  
PO Box 830-\852, Amman, Jordan  
Factory: Tel: 723-601/2/3  
Fax: 723-356  
PO Box 128, Sahab, Jordan

Dassan, Farid A., Modern Light Trading and Const. Co. LLC  
Managing Director  
Tel: 968-590-734, 590-735  
Fax: 592-476  
PO Box 579, Ruwi, Postal Code 112  
Sultanate of Oman

Dhaimade, Suhas, Al Fajer Information & Services  
Exhibition Manager  
Tel: 971-4-621-133  
Fax: 622-802  
PO Box 11183, Dubai, UAE

Faisal, P.P., Family Food Centre  
General Manager  
Tel: 974-428-935, 422-456, 448-598  
Fax: 448-868  
PO Box 5483  
Doha, Qatar

Fernandes, Aldrin, UAE Business Pages  
Senior Account Executive  
Tel: 4-825-789  
Fax: 4-825-345  
PO Box 52587, Dubai

Halaqah, Dr. M., Jordan Export Development and Commercial Centers Corporation  
General Manager  
Tel: 603507  
Fax: 684-568  
PO Box 7704, Amman, Jordan

Hashim, Moh'd, Catering Manager  
General Trading & Food Processing Co. (BSC)  
Tel: 973-276-603m 242-158  
Fax: 246-237  
PO Box 20202  
Bahrain

Ioannis, Cpt. Vlahos, Port Khalid Cold Stores Co. (PVT) Ltd. Sharjah Port  
Tel: 971-6-281-796  
Fax: 284-820  
PO Box 7097, Sharjah, UAE

Ja'aouni, Bader, Mushrif Enterprises and Trading Co.  
Manager, Food-Stuff Division  
Tel: 968-693-620, Store: 788-680  
Fax: 604-600, Store: 786-835  
PO Box 1289, Postal Code 112, Ruwi  
Sultanate of Oman

Jandali, Mamoon Muhammed, Al Fayha Trading Co.  
Tel: 968-705-920, 703-496, 702-420  
Fax: 705-923  
PO Box 7122 Ruwi  
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Kafood, Ahmed, Department of Industrial Development  
Ministry of Industry  
Tel: 832-085, 832-121  
Fax: 832-024  
Doha, Qatar

Khabbaz, H.T. Muscat Cold Stores  
General Manager  
Tel: 968-707-021, 707-023  
Fax: 704-536  
PO Box 2365, Ruwi, Postal Code 112  
Sultanate of Oman

Khalaf, Abdul Fatah, Abdulla Al Khalaf Trading Est.  
Tel: 974-663-712, 661-639, 654-723  
Fax: 663-711  
PO Box 421  
Doha, Qatar

Marhoon, A. Hadi A., Public Relations Manager  
Bahrain Chamber of Commerce & Industry  
Tel: 973-233-913, 277-290  
Fax: 241-294  
PO Box 248  
Bahrain

Narain, Ram, Manager  
General Trading and Food Processing Co. (BSC)  
Tel: 973-729-107, 728-407, 729-731, 729-766  
Fax: 727-380  
PO Box 20202  
Bahrain

Rajendran, P.K., Al-Hootie Commercial Centre LLC  
Manager  
Tel: 968-605-545  
Al Khuwair PO Box 6697  
Ruwi, CR No. 28617  
Sultanate of Oman

Saeed, Rushdi Mahmood, Mahmood Saeed Collective Co.  
Managing Director  
PO Box 31264, Jeddah 21497, Saudi Arabia  
Tel: 6366146, 6360020, 6364153, 6333021  
Fax: 6375286, 6372006, 6375189, 6430642

Salman, Jaffer Habib, Oman Company Ltd. LLC.

Director

Tel: 968-702-294, 704-473

Fax: 798-305

PO Box 3517, Ruwi, Muscat

Sultanate of Oman

Salman, Mohamed Habib, Mazoon United Co. (LLC)

Managing Director

Tel: 968-705-163, 707-488, 702-654

Fax: 708-323

PO Box 7073, Muttrah

Sultanate of Oman

Sonalla, Zaki Abdulla, Al Khumasiya Penta Trading Co.

Managing Director

Tel: 974-426-211, 426-212

Fax: 422-172

PO Box 653

Doha, Qatar

Wright, Michael, SPINNEYS

Retail Operations Manager

Tel: 04-346-743

Fax: 04-376-426

## GULF ACTIVITY EVALUATION

The purpose of the Gulf Activity was participation in the Dubai Spring Fair, conduct of a Trial Marketing Shipment, and an Importer Contact Visit to the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar and Bahrain.

This evaluation attempts to develop an objective analysis of the activities in order to improve performance of a similar nature in the future.

### A. General

#### 1. Compatibility of group selected.

Excellent

Good

Poor

Comment:

#### 2. Adequacy of trip agenda.

Too Long

Too Short

Other

Comment:

#### 3. Perspective of Gulf Country market potential after this trip.

More enlightened

Optimistic

Pessimistic

Other

Comment:

4. How should group have prepared to this visit?

Individuals assigned to develop in-depth knowledge of specific countries.

Other

Comment:

5. Performance of the group "chairman".

Excellent

Good

Poor

Comment:

6. What should the group have had as a handout?

Brochures

Samples

Other

Comment:

7. How many trips have you made to the countries visited?

United Arab Emirates

Oman

Qatar

Bahrain

Comment:

**B. Fair**

1. Adequacy of Jordan Exporter's Association exhibit.

Excellent

Good

Poor

Comments:

2. Impression of JEDCO and idea of collaborating with them in future activities.

Excellent

Good

Poor

Comments:

3. AMO participation.

Excellent

Good

Poor

Comments:

4. Statistical information would have been useful. Such as Jordan exports to Gulf in fresh products.

Agree

Disagree

Comments:

5. Participation of the Sigma One Senior Technical Representative.

Useful

Not Useful

Comments:

**C. Trial Marketing Shipment (TMS)**

The intent of this component was to demonstrate the possibility to put quality Jordanian produce on the supermarket shelf in Dubai and in Oman.

1. Did you see any problem with product?

Shelf Life

Appearance

Other

Comment:

2. Based on this experience what should be done about future trial shipments?

TMS not necessary

More planning

Other

Comments:

3. Should further TMS by air, land or sea to the Gulf be considered?

Yes

No

Comments:

4. Will Association members be willing to continue TMS with a decreasing support from AMDP?

Yes

No

Comments:

**D. Importer Contact Trip**

1. Do you believe your participation contributed to a greater awareness of Jordan's potential for quality?

Agree

Disagree

Comments:

2. Did you establish new, useful contacts for future business?

Yes

No

Comments:

3. Did you make any deals?

Yes

No

Comments:

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