

SEKEM *Insight*

SEKEM's Journal for Culture, Economy,
Society and Ecology in Egypt

Editorial

Dear Readers,

in the coming months SEKEM staff will participate in a number of public events in various places in Germany. In this issue of SEKEM Insight, we would like to provide you with some more details.

Of 23-24 May, the 7th KarmaKonsum conference will take place in Frankfurt. SEKEM Managing Director Helmy Abouleish will hold the keynote address on „Be the Change“. More information on the event can be found on the last page of this issue.

On 4 May, SEKEM Representative for Press and Public Relations in Europe, Bijan Kafi, will speak on occasion of the 34. Protestant Church Congress in Hamburg on the topic „Food Security Through Organic Farming.“ A panel discussion will follow the speech. The programme for the event organised by SEKEM-partner oikocredit is available at www.oikocredit.de. Their employees will also present SEKEM at "Partnership 2013", a meeting of the Ecumenical Agency Weitblick of the Ev.-Luth. Church-district Hamburg-West/Südholstein (<http://partnership2013.de>).

You are cordially invited to participate in these events.

Your Team of Editors

Find SEKEM also on the Internet at:



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How Demeter Potatoes Promote Development in Egypt

In recent months, many customers of Egyptian organic products have questioned their purchasing decisions: Is it ecologically and economically acceptable to purchase foreign products that are also available locally? SEKEM believes, it is. SEKEM Insight explains, why.



On the Sinai Peninsula, SEKEM produces Demeter potatoes on 22 hectares of ground that has been reclaimed from the desert through bio-dynamic farming methods.

Sandy hills and valleys stretch as far as the eye can see, wind gusts blow fine dust through the air, a few remnants of dried prickly bushes suffer in the scorching sun. No shadow is to be seen anywhere, no birds, no grass, no green of any kind stands the arid climate in this remote place of rural Egypt. The deserts on the Sinai Peninsula indeed seem to be among the most hostile places imaginable. Nothing invites us to stay for a longer

time in this hot summer of the year 2008. And yet this is exactly the place where SEKEM's experienced farmers with a team of co-workers began to break ground for another chapter in bio-dynamic farming in Egypt to be opened by the SEKEM Initiative.

After the very first year of preparation and cultivation, the same area is barely recognizable: lush green clover now gently sways in the wind and

the first rows of Casuarina trees provide a natural windbreak for the first crops that will arrive later in the year. The natural diversity of animals also is beginning to improve at the very moment plants begin to reclaim the desert. The first white cattle egrets are already strutting by the young clover pecking for insects.

Fast forward to just four years later, and work on SEKEM's Sinai farm is already in full swing in the summer of 2012. Each year since inauguration day, new areas have been reclaimed by applying large quantities of compost to the barren desert floor. Even orange trees could eventually be planted. They will provide citrus fruits for processing into juice and jam at SEKEM's firm ISIS. Beans and zucchini are also grown, always in alternating rhythm with legumes such as clover and peanuts that inject valuable nitrogen into the still barren soil. Meanwhile, even a flock of sheep has found its home on the new farm.

Critical Questions

For the second time, potatoes could also be cultivated on this plot of land during the fall of 2012. 50 employees were busy bringing the seedlings into the ground in early October. During the winter months, they were irrigated and fertilized with compost. Since the potatoes are grown in accordance with the requirements of bio-dynamic cultivation, horn manure and horn silica preparations were also applied.

Harvest time eventually came in mid-February 2013: a tractor brings the potatoes to the surface. However, they are then collected by hand — as is still common in most of Egypt. The small quantity of „only“ 300 tons of potatoes does not require mechanized harvesting and so provides many people in what is one of the most disadvantaged regions of the Egypt with important opportunities for gainful employment. Thus, by furthering local agriculture, SEKEM also creates important social and cultural structures that help the local population develop and sustain their development potential.

The bulk of the potatoes of each year is exported to Germany. Here, it is imported by SEKEM's trading partners BioTropic, who sells them on the German organic food market. It is also here in Germany, that the question has recently been raised for some time by consumers, whether it is ecologically and economically sensible to buy organic potatoes from Egypt. Is it not preferable to purchase German stock potatoes from last year?

Indeed, if we compare selected parameters of production, we quickly find arguments that seem to clearly speak against the import of Egyptian potatoes. For instance, as the products have to be transported by ship, their CO₂ emissions are obviously higher than that of products grown locally and taken from storage. Moreover, some argue that, as Egyptian potatoes grow only on irrigated soil, water consumption in the traditionally water-starved country is much higher than it is in Germany, thus posing a greater environmental risk.

Against Monoculture, for Diversity

However, for Mohamed Helmy, Operations Manager on SEKEM's Sinai farm, the complex interrelationship of factors is more important than the simple consideration of isolated aspects: "We believe that the export of Demeter potatoes from our farms is nevertheless justified", he explains. "To understand this, we must look at the bigger picture."

„First, potatoes are an integral part of our crop rotation scheme on the new Sinai farm. They can manage with the low quality soil and thus, in combination with beans, sesame seeds and clover, help us create a fertile basis for life in the dry desert, that, after some time, exhibits a very rich biodiversity." Crop rotation on the one hand improves soil quality (through clover and beans), and on the other hand provides the necessary feed



SEKEM's co-workers who work on the Sinai farm live on it, too, right next to the Suez canal.

for domesticated animals such as the sheep mentioned earlier (through clover). These produce the compost which in turn enables the production of healthy products in the first place.

Through such land reclamation and development work by SEKEM, more than 40 animal and plant species have returned to the original SEKEM farm in the course of the past 35 years. This encompasses mainly birds and insects, but also mammals such as mongoose and fox. This development of the desert through sustainable agriculture also creates opportunities for employment and better living standards for the many people living still well below the poverty line in these areas of Egypt. Among the communities that populate parts of the deserts of the country, such as the Sinai, the illiteracy rate is often close to 70%, particularly among women. Here, SEKEM here is often the only employer who, through the formation of key social structures, contributes to a reduction of their dependency on long-term development aid.



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WWW.AVENTERRA.DE



SEKEM's agricultural development helps encourage social development in Egypt and secure its financial success in the long term.

Reduced Water Consumption

Mohamed Helmy also strives to see his farm as a vital part in an organic relationship of plants, animals, and their natural surroundings as well as the people benefitting from and caring for them. His view is in marked contrast to the usual large-scale agricultural investments that are common in Egypt, where, in most parts, monoculture still rules. These large-scale plantations allow for great production capacities through massive amounts of water, artificial fertilizers, and pesticides to prepare the ground for use that will only last for a few years. For some of these years, mostly potatoes will be grown here until the soil will bear no more.

SEKEM believes in an entirely different approach. Firstly, it is important to remember, that, no matter what crop is grown in Egypt, virtually every plant relies on irrigation because of the extremely low average precipitation levels. These range from „zero millimetres“ in the southern desert areas to up to 100 millimetres in the Nile Delta. On the Sinai, they average 30 millimetres each year. Any kind of development in Egypt therefore always relies on human intervention.

This is why it is so important to improve soil fertility and resilience through biodynamic farming. It increases the ability of the desert to resist pests as well as to store water and therefore performs a “healing function”. On the Sinai farm, SEKEM today makes do with about 12% less water than conventional farms, according to a study. Another study demonstrates the effect of SEKEM's compost on soil fertility, which is permanently improved by the formation of humus providing a basis for microorganisms.

Development Requires Time and Dedication

Only through projects like these will Egypt be able to reclaim its desert land which accounts for 96% of the country, in a sustainable way. Only this unavoidable development will allow it to not only feed a growing population, but also to provide it with healthy food that requires less water and no chemicals to grow.

This work takes time and commitment. Global trade helps to replace development aid through mutual partnerships that, if established fairly, can last a long time. These relationships have allowed SEKEM to flourish and develop into an organisation

that thrives on stable, long-standing cooperation with trading partners in Europe and customers. This has allowed it to greatly expand the cultivation of bio-dynamic farming in the country. SEKEM also works with many local Demeter farmers whose products it processes and then sells.

Where SEKEM is active, benefits become tangible not only for the local flora and fauna, but also for the people. It is the reliable partnerships among partners abiding by the Demeter scheme and customers making the conscious decision to support it through their purchases, that allow SEKEM to continue its development work. Therefore, the decision for an Egyptian organic product is always a decision for greater sustainable development in a place greatly in need of such impulses today, but to the benefit of all of mankind.

“Sustainability should not be evaluated in terms of selectively chosen aspects, but in a global context”, comments Christina Anlauf, who runs SEKEM's German office in Bochum. “The purchase of our potatoes offers German customers an opportunity to help replace conventional with sustainable organic farming. It also helps to make organic products more affordable in poorer regions and make this development less dependent on aid”.

Bijan Kafi, Christina Anlauf

! The studies mentioned in this article are available on request from SEKEM.

BioTropic GmbH

BioTropic GmbH is a German importer of organic products with branches in several countries. Its goal is the transparent procurement of organic foods and ensurance of the safety of raw produce from organic farming. BioTropic aims to work as closely with producers as possible.

BioTropic started with the import of organic bananas from the Dominican Republic in 1997. Meanwhile, organic products of all kinds are imported from many parts of the world to Europe every year.

„It Requires a Lot of Empathy to Successfully Manage Conflict“

In March, Scilla Elworthy, long-time friend of SEKEM and activist herself in the global movement for peace, led a course in conflict resolution for staff of the SEKEM Group. SEKEM Insight-author Fatma Sami spoke with her and a participant.

In 1982 Dr. Scilla Elworthy founded the Oxford Research Group in the United Kingdom with the aim to facilitate a fruitful dialogue between decision makers on worldwide nuclear policy and its critics. In subsequent years she supported extensive exchanges between Chinese, Russian and Western nuclear scientists and military officials through a series of focused events aiming to facilitating dialogue. In 2002, she founded the non-profit organization „Peace Direct“ to fund peace builders in crisis regions around the world, to encourage their work, and to learn from their experiences. This led to the recognition of the value and benefit of locally-led initiatives of this kind by the United Nations. In 2005 Peace Direct was awarded the prize „Best New Non-Profit Organization“ in the United Kingdom.

Scilla Elworthy received the 2003 Niwano Peace Prize and was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace Prize. She also advised the musician Peter Gabriel, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the entrepreneur Richard Branson in setting up „The Elders,“ a group of experienced individuals and seasoned statesmen who offer their advisory capacity for charitable causes on a global level. Elworthy is also a member of China's Hanwang Forum, Council Member of the World Future Council and author of numerous books.

SEKEM Insight-author Fatma Samy spoke with Scilla Elworthy and event participants on SEKEM and the future of the Heliopolis University during a workshop she had recently organized at SEKEM for its staff. The workshop, entitled „Be Agents of Change“ was to encourage young people to become



Scilla Elworthy, founder of the organisation Peace Direct, carried out a workshop in conflict management at SEKEM for its staff and co-workers at the Heliopolis University.

engaged as “change makers” and in this role to work actively for sustainable change on a global level.

Scilla, what impression did you have of the new Heliopolis University?

I think the Heliopolis University is a great institution because it is very forward-looking. I especially liked that its organisers tried so hard to integrate the diversity of human experiences into its teaching programme at a very high level.

I am particularly pleased that skills such as painting, singing and dancing are to be taught at the new institution to specifically develop the personalities of the individuals studying here with the aim to broaden the basis for their experiences.

What would you say is the key to success for the realization of new ideas in a culture that discourages innovative thinking?

Well, most pioneers of innovative ideas have gotten used to living through a hard time of many failures at the beginning of their ventures. They expect that it will not be easy to succeed with new approaches. This experience is a part of any such mission. However, in the case of sustainable development, the goal is much more urgent and of such fundamental importance for the future of all of us and especially our children and their grandchildren, that failure really is not an option. If we do not choose the path of sustainable development, they will have no future.

Could the Heliopolis University be a reasonable way to help sustainability succeed in Egypt?

Yes, I think and I hope so very much!

Maii El Shorbagy is a communications expert at the Heliopolis University. She took part in the



Scilla Elworthy during her course at SEKEM.

working group and tells about her experience.

Maii, how were your impressions of the event?

To me, the workshop was exceptionally useful because it brought our very personal perceptions of the subject in motion, and inspired all of us greatly.

We immediately noticed at the outset that we had to get out of our classical „workshop“ setting to get to know other sides of us. So, we began with the “Aung San Suu Khi meditation.” During this exercise we had a chance to breathe, to relax and to also start the day in an emotionally refreshed mood.

This became important soon as we then quickly began to talk about human relationships, how we treat each other in our interpersonal encounters, and how conflict develop. We aimed to understand the ways in which conflicts arise, how we can deal with them, and, hopefully, solve them. An important part of our work together was to analyse the factors that contribute to the emergence of conflicts.

We found out that it is very important to understand the emotional and mental state of a person, to really understand how he or she feels. We talked about how important it is to emotionally grasp the atmosphere of an encounter, to listen attentively to what is said, and to understand what emotions remain hidden behind them. To successfully deal with conflicts requires a lot of empathy.

Scilla also introduced us to the “Dayad exercise”. In this exercise, people sit in pairs, opposite to each other. They fully engage in the practice of attentively listening to one another and to purposefully direct their own attention to what is said with the goal of emotionally and mentally grasp not only its meaning, but also its emotional dimension.

Scilla explained to us, that conflicts usually arise when we are not on the same level of communication, especially when meetings turn emotional. If we were to take two minutes to identify and name the problem, each one of us could become aware of the “tipping point” of situation. Then everyone could speak for a moment rather about their own insecurity than about accusations concerning others. We actually applied this technique to great success in our workshop.

Lastly, Scilla asked us what skills of conflict and communication management mattered most to all of us. Each of us decided what would be particularly valuable for him or her to learn to advance their personalities. We then discussed these goals in detail with each other and in the group. During this process it became clear to us how the concrete experience of our encounters had helped us gain new practical experience in dealing with conflicts had assisted us in better understanding ourselves and the people we deal with in our daily lives.

Fatma Sami

Fatma Sami works in New Media and Communication team based in Cairo. She supports SEKEM Insight also as an author.

New ISIS Online Shop Launches in Egypt



ISIS Organic has launched its all new online shop, serving greater Cairo with the great range of Organic and Demeter products. With a permanent discount on all products, this shop is very competitive, while additionally very convenient. Delivery is done by a partner company, delivering the products to your doorstep within a maximum of 36 hours after the order. “we are very happy to finally open the online shop, especially as it has been tough to overcome the difficulties of delivery, such as the question on how to deliver a temperature and light sensitive product safely and still affordable!” says Osama, digital marketing manager of ISIS. “Our work has just started”, says Moataz, developer of myISishop.com, “an online platform is living through updates and development and we already have tons of ideas we plan to implement in the next phases”.

The combination of the website of ISIS allows shoppers to receive background information on products they purchase. Before, during and after a purchase, shoppers receive information from health benefits, production cycle to the farm where the raw material originates. “New tools, serving the overall concept are already planned and will follow soon, contributing to more transparency, interactivity and Organic Lifestyle”, says Thomas Abouleish, New Media & Communication Director of ISIS.

Fatma Sami

Impressions from SEKEM



S EKEM's Spring Festival is a day of celebrating the natural diversity of the life on the SEKEM Farm that has struck permanent roots in the Egyptian desert after 35 years of development work: the rich variety of flowers and plants, birds and insects, and not least the people who gather in the SEKEM community to live and work together. The festival is a special event because it encompasses a dual view on SEKEM both as a permanent dream and an actual reality: the reality of SEKEM today is symbolized by the delight of its co-workers over the achievements made, while the desire to contribute to the creation of a more humane world and more tolerant collaboration of cultures remains a challenge and motivation. The annual festival coincides with the birthday of Dr. Ibrahim Abouleish.

Performances by SEKEM co-workers, friends, and partners presented selected results from their recent work. SEKEM School pupils congratulated Dr. Abouleish by reciting poems by J.W. v. Goethe in German, English, and Arabic. Students of the Heliopolis University also reported on their research. Students of the University of Zagazig had recently worked on environmental problems in Egypt. In their results, which they presented, they referred to SEKEM as an outstanding example. The festival was closed with a piece from Mozart's Magic Flute, that aimed to symbolize the spiritual and emotional advancement of man through study and wisdom. It pointed out that man has to overcome obstacles as challenges to his personality to succeed in bringing about positive change in the world.

Fatma Sami

7. KarmaKonsum Conference with Helmy Abouleish

The 7th KarmaKonsum conference 2013 will be held this year between 23 and 24 May 2013 at the IHK Frankfurt. SEKEM will participate in the event with Helmy Abouleish who will hold the keynote speech of the event on the theme „Be the Change“.

The overarching topic of the event is „Unity in Diversity. Cooperation Among Grassroots and Mainstream in the Area of Sustainability“. Under this motto, decision makers and thought leaders will meet at the conference which is combined with a congress and networking event for responsible management and sustainable as well as healthy lifestyles (LOHAS).

Speakers from research, business, politics and culture will be discussing social, spiritual and cultural sustainability trends in theory and practice and their influence on corporate, employee and consumer side in the context of the conference part that will be held on 23 May.

On 24 May, the innovative ideas and networking market “Green Camp” will allow participants to engage in collaboration through workshops aiming to bring together like-minded people to facilitate the implementation of ideas. At an accompanying trade show, exhibitors will be able to present sustainable alternatives to conventional business and lifestyles.

In the evening of the 23 May, the “Founders Award” event will conclude the conference and will be open for visitors of the “Green Camp”. The aim of the Award is to promote eco-social start-ups by facilitating relevant industry contacts and give their business ideas an attractive forum for presentation to a professional public.

Source: KarmaKonsum

! More information:
• <http://www.karmakonsum.de>

Spring Festival at the FAIR Handelshaus Bavaria



On 27 April, the FAIR Handelshaus Bavaria eG will celebrate its annual Spring Festival together with customers, friends and interested participants. From 10:00 to 16:00 tasty food and drinks from organic and fair production will be available on the premises at the company headquarters in Amperpettenbach (near Unterschleißheim). Partner companies will be opening their own booths, the “coffee-roasting Land Rover” by Original Food will also pay a visit, and the special exhibition „Glass, Ceramics & Garden“ will also be open to the public. Children can look forward to pony rides and the Popa-Raff band will perform during the event.

The FAIR Handelshaus Bavaria eG is the nationwide regional center of fair trade and is supported by a cooperative, which is made up of world shops, action groups, and individuals dedicated to supporting global development. Its activities include consultancy services for world shops, further education, information, and advocacy as well as wholesaling for world shops and fair trade groups. SEKEM products are a part of its product portfolio available at <http://www.fairbayern.de>. The address of the trading house: FAIR Handelshaus Bayern eG, Alte Kreisstraße 29, 85778 Haimhausen-Amperpettenbach. Tel: 08133/1482 or 8436, Fax: 08133/6744, info@fairbayern.de

Christina Anlauf

! More information:
• <http://www.fairbayern.de>

SEKEM Products Available at Amorebio

Since the beginning of the year, SEKEM in Germany has been cooperating with the online shop www.amorebio.de for the sale of SEKEM-branded products. All products offered in Germany under the brand name of SEKEM can now be ordered via the online presence of Amorebio. SEKEMs own online shop at www.sekemshop.de will be discontinued.

Customers can order now shop for all SEKEM products available in Germany, including dates, sesame bars, and “Sunfruit” spreads, as well as other organic products by brands such as Lebensbaum or Rapunzel. This also carries the benefit of making better use of packaging and shipping costs. „In fact, SEKEM sesame bars are our most beloved product”, says Adriana Zambrano, who is responsible for the selection of products and portfolio design at Amorebio.

For over 10 years Amorebio has been offering organic products and supplements its portfolio with special promotions and background information. Of course, SEKEM products remain available in organic supermarkets, natural food stores, and other stores.

Christina Anlauf



Masthead:
The editors of SEKEM Insight wish to thank all contributors to this issue.

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