

Israel Emergency: Funding Opportunities

Restoring Agriculture in the Western Negev

Updated: October 7, 2024

This paper is one of a series highlighting additional opportunities for Jewish Federations and other funders seeking to make impactful direct investments to address the crisis in Israel. While the Jewish Federations of North America Emergency Response Committee is primarily focusing its allocations across four strategic categories: Lifeline Services, Medical and Trauma Relief, Economic Relief and Recovery, and Community Resilience and Rebuilding, there are other pressing needs for which funds have been requested. This series features investment opportunities that (1) are not being funded by the Committee or (2) are receiving grants from the Committee that fund part – but not all – of the requested budget.

Partner: ReGrow Israel, an initiative of Volcani International Partnerships

Area of Need: Replacing destroyed or looted agricultural equipment essential for restoring the devastated farming communities of the western Negev.

Proposed Budget: ReGrow Israel calculates that it will cost over \$24 million to replace the agricultural equipment targeted on October 7 by Hamas. Israeli government compensation is estimated to cover approximately half of the costs. ReGrow Israel is seeking the remainder – \$12.5 million – from philanthropy.

Funds Raised (as of October 7, 2024): \$5,389,000

Understanding the Need

The kibbutzim, moshavim, and independent farms of the western Negev made the desert bloom and have been a source of national and Zionist pride for decades. These farms are the breadbasket of Israel, supplying 75% of Israel's vegetables, 20% of fruit, and 6.5% of milk, as well as other products.¹

¹ "75% of Israel's vegetables are from farms bordering Gaza," *Globes*, Oct. 16, 2023.

On October 7, Hamas terrorists targeted farm equipment, infrastructure, and farmworkers. They stole or destroyed everything in their path from irrigation pipes and computers to tractors to specialized farming vehicles. They kidnapped and killed foreign workers and Israelis in their murderous path. In invading these communities, Hamas, other terrorist groups, and Gazan civilians brutally attacked residents, their homes, and the farms that these Israelis worked decades to build.

This act of agricultural terrorism was aimed at shaking the identity and economy of the western Negev and the food security of Israel.

Full resumption of agriculture is essential for the recovery of these communities and Israel's national security. This depends upon replacement of their equipment.

The communities face financial challenges in replacing their equipment. The government's insurance fund ("*Mas Rechush*") covers the replacement costs of equipment as valued at the day it was destroyed, while farmers will need to purchase new equipment as used equipment is not available. Private insurance will not cover these losses caused by an act of war.

ReGrow Israel estimates that there will be a 50% shortfall between the *Mas Rechush* payments and what is needed to purchase the equipment – and the timeline for payments through *Mas Rechush* is unclear. The government has not committed to further funding despite multiple requests.

Program Description

This project will enable the farmers victimized on October 7 to secure the equipment they urgently need. This includes the six kibbutzim that suffered most of the losses, as well as other kibbutzim, moshavim, and independent farmers.

Philanthropic funding will provide these farmers – who have suffered major financial losses since October 7 – the confidence to purchase essential equipment while signaling the strong support of our North American Jewish community for them during these difficult times. *Mishkei Hanegev* – a cooperative representing the kibbutzim in the region – will loan funds for the other half of the costs, which will later be covered by the *Mas Rechush* reimbursements.

Mishkei Hanegev will aid in purchasing the equipment. The cooperative is ready to order the equipment immediately once the funds have been secured.



Approach of Jewish Federations of North America Emergency Response Committee

The Israel Emergency Response Committee has identified this initiative as an urgent priority as part of its work in the area of Economic Relief and Rescue and a central first move to help the communities of the western Negev rebuild following the devastation of October 7. The Committee invites interested Federations and donors to join this effort. Given the urgency and in order to enable farmers to begin planting, the Committee is advancing the full \$12.5 million to enable the farmers to purchase equipment immediately while funds are raised.

Understanding the Impact



Moran Friedbach was born and raised on Kibbutz Nahal Oz, near the Gaza border, where he and his wife have lived with their five children. To Moran and his fellow kibbutz members, farming is central to their heritage, tradition, and sense of belonging deeply rooted in the soil.

Moran experienced the terrorist attacks on October 7 when Hamas raided the kibbutz. Among those murdered were Moran's friends and members of his family.

Courageously, Moran returned shortly after the attack to fulfill his duties as the kibbutz's Head of Agriculture and take on the additional role of Head of Security.



Upon his return, Moran saw the systematic nature of Hamas' destruction of agriculture – including livestock, equipment, and every one of the kibbutz's computer-controlled irrigation boxes. In an act of defiance and resilience, Moran replanted every furrow of wheat to the edge of the kibbutz near the Gaza border, even while under fire and with the protection of a tank.

Despite enduring unfathomable suffering and the destruction at Kibbutz Nahal Oz, Moran remains resolute in his determination to rebuild and restore the land.

Tractor Sponsorship Levels²

Small Tractor: Irrigation – \$95,000

The western Negev is where Israeli pioneers made the desert bloom. Critical to the agriculture in the region is water and irrigation. This tractor (Masey Ferguson 4445) is essential for taking the irrigation pipes out to the field and laying them down to enable water to flow to the crops.

Midsize Tractor: Planting and Harvesting – \$200,000

This tractor (John Deere 6215R) is used to transport to the fields the machinery required to plant and harvest. In Kibbutz Nir Oz, for example, it is used to take the wheat planter out to sow the seeds and to take out the potato combiner at harvest time.

Large Tractor: Tilling the Soil – \$335,000

This tractor (John Deere 8345R) is used by farmers to till the soil, preparing it properly for planting. Without it the crops will not grow.

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² The farming communities in the Western Negev are purchasing numerous models of tractors, as well as other equipment. The model purchased may differ from the specific models (and prices) noted above.

