



Kaima Nahalal Farm

Social, Business & Environmental Action Learning for Troubled Israeli Girls & Young Women

2020 Program Highlights

The organization

Founded in 2016 and operational since 2017, Kaima Nahalal, a non-profit educational farm improves opportunities and choices for troubled girls and young women in Israel's Northern Jezreel Valley, and engages the larger community, especially women's groups, in the process. Through our flagship employment initiative, we empower girls (ages 15-18) who have dropped out of school or are on the cusp of doing, so as well as young women (ages 18-21) whose challenges continue into young adulthood. In our care are those suffering drug/alcohol addiction, sexual abuse, and dangerously poor self-esteem, among other challenges. By tapping into the healing power of nature and utilizing the tool of employment, our approach successfully changes the downward trajectory of their lives and redirects them to normative educational and social frameworks. Currently, we operate four initiatives:

- Project Lavender – Long-term employment and empowerment initiative for girls and young women
- Garden of Eve - Short-term feminist farming and agricultural workshops for all women
- Project Earth Care – Short-term earth-care programming for the general community
- Feed my Neighbor – Vegetable donation program

Since we began programming in May 2017, we have provided employment to 140 youth:

- 72 long-term (more than 3 months) – girls and young women ¹
- 16 medium-term (1-3 months) – girls and young women ¹
- 52 summer program (6 weeks) – girls and boys from local regional council

The farm is led by a multi-generational, all-women professional team of social activists, agriculturalists, and pedagogues, committed to advancing the first all girl/women-run farm in Kaima's growing alternative educational network. We support our efforts through 1) self-generated income from Consumer Supported Agricultural (CSA²) sales and workshop user fees at appreciable levels, 2) government buy-in, and 3) philanthropy.

Statement on the impact of COVID-19

This past year must be viewed through the lens of the pandemic. While many other regional (and national) youth-outreach programs were forced to intermittently suspend activities throughout 2020, we remained fully operational. As the demand for safe food chains increased, we responded. And, as requests from other organizations and community groups for food donations soared, we re-imagined our entire food distribution program. Indeed, Kaima Nahalal stepped up in ways we could not have anticipated would be necessary, stretching resources to absorb more vulnerable girls and young women than initially projected, and proving the strength of our operating model. A brief look at the pandemic's impact on our plans follows:

¹ Of this number some 95% who leave, return to normative educational settings within 3 months; all who leave upon turning 18 participate in national/military service, social commitments not remotely on their radar when we met them.

² CSA is a global social-sales platform that connects local farmers to consumers, who pay a set price for a share of the anticipated harvest. Farmers benefit from advance cash flow; consumers receive a weekly box of pesticide-free vegetables.

1. Impact on youth

The farm--considered an "essential service" provider given our work with youth and contribution to the region's food-delivery system-- continued operating throughout Israel's various shutdowns with our young farmers playing a key role in sustaining the farm and ensuring we meet our weekly sales targets which grew by 28%. During the first government closure, while a few participants either chose not to work or were unable to owing to directives limiting public transportation, we actually integrated a number of new participants not initially on our radar, including those with special needs and others suffering from eating disorders.

Moreover, following government directives which forced the shutdown of certain programs that receive Ministry of Welfare funding, which we do not, Kaima Nahalal began to provide significant resources to other NGOs. For example, we rallied over the summer, stretching our resources yet further, to integrate a group of girls from a local boarding school and a pre-army program for young women, both of which had to cease operations. The fall saw the renewal of these collaborations as well as a new partnership with local authorities connected to government-mandated Kidum Noar youth advancement programs to address the social and educational needs of high-risk girls in their care. For many, the structure of the farm and its goal of growing healthy food, was a way to anchor the young person during a period of extreme distress and emotional chaos.

2. Impact on programming

While our employment program was carried out as noted above, unfortunately, owing to pandemic-related budget cuts, we did not expand our complementary educational programming as intended. With the right funding, this is something we hope to do in the coming year with an emphasis on facilitating off-site certificate-granting, workplace-preparation, and self-defense programs. We also had to postpone the launch of our first residential program, now rescheduled to begin in September 2021.

3. Impact on staff

Farm staff and national service volunteers are still, as of this writing, working overtime to address pressing farm and business needs; attend to regular participants; integrate new participants referenced above; train new volunteers, and manage increased agricultural operations.

4. Impact on sales

The crisis has triggered increased requests from current and new CSA customers. People in this largely agricultural region, fearful to go to supermarkets, understand the benefits of continuing to eat their veggies. We have consistently tracked an increase from small box orders to large box orders (as well as our new "jumbo" box), with some customers helping to underwrite our weekly food donation program to the needy.

In summary, Kaima Nahalal expanded our target population, implemented new activities, grew geographically, and matured professionally. And while we still face many continuing challenges—in addition to those presented by the pandemic—in looking back, we proudly acknowledge our progress. We provided valuable educational resources in Israel's northern periphery; we produced healthy organic vegetables for scores of families, using sustainable farming methods and generating significant income; and we created a warm, supportive, learning community, where girls and young women feel a sense of belonging, are given the tools needed for greater independence, and have the opportunity to learn from and with more mature women.

Review of programs

1. Youth outreach

- a. **Project Lavender:** We initially projected the ability to recruit a rotating group of 30 young farmers* to join our 2020 intensive agricultural employment programming. We are pleased to have been able to engage 27 young farmers in this track, the majority participating 2-4 times per week for at least 4 months. Of those who graduated in 2020, 95% have moved on to assume important life challenges:

- 3 joined the army
- 4 are performing national service
- 4 are pursuing professional studies
- 8 returned to fulltime school studies
- 1 is enrolled in a Kidum Noar program
- 1 started academic studies
- The rest are still on our team

* The project was first initiated in 2017 for girls (15-18), identified by Israel's Ministry of Welfare as having left or being at high risk of leaving the formal school system. After great success with this sector, and owing to high demand by other direct service providers, we are now beginning to integrate another population into daily farm life: young women (18-21). Participants in this new cohort are referred through NGO Tmura, in association with Israel's Ministry of Welfare. Tmura facilitates modified national service programming for troubled young women after they age-out of other programs, such as treatment facilities, or following incarceration. With the right funding, in 2021 we will appreciably scale outreach by opening our first residential program this population.

b. Special COVID-19 Program Resources were diverted to provide meaningful engagement/employment for 16 girls (ages 15-18) without a framework during the two-month COVID-19 shutdown.

c. 2020 Summer Program: In collaboration with local authorities, our Project Lavender young farmers helped implement a special summer program for 16 local youth, ages 15-18, five of whom were girls.

d. Involvement of other agencies:

- Jezreel Valley Regional Council
- HaAgudah LeHitnadvut
- Yated (national program for the advancement of young men and women at risk)
- Not Standing By (an NGO which helps women exit the cycle of prostitution)
- Ein Yahav (pre-army program)
- Sarit (service-year program)
- Yokneam (service-year program)
- Shaked School
- Haroot Lamerchkim (pre-army program)
- Merchavia Youth Group

2. Group programming

Spring, summer and autumn are usually times when Kaima Nahalal is buzzing with back-to-back visitors from Israel and around the world who come to volunteer in our fields and take part in our unique agricultural group programming. Typically, more than 2,000 people participate in a range of programming to encourage environmental activism, learn about earth-care, cultural food traditions, hunger in the community, and Jewish text reference to humanity's relationship with nature. This year, however, in the wake of the pandemic, all bookings were canceled. Even those people who optimistically rescheduled for later in the year, again called things off.

Though we were approached by some of groups that had come to us in the past to present elements of the program online, our hands-on group farming activities (which include groups upwards of 40 people at a time) were suspended. Given that we do not yet know when tourism will resume, we are working on a new marketing strategy with tour guides to try to encourage local groups to come. Our 2021 projections are both optimistic and realistic in this regard.

Summary of challenges and lessons learned

1. Adjustments to our budget owing to the pandemic

We reduced our organizational budget by ~15%. Income from tourism and challenges with fundraising required adjustments to expenditures. Our FY budget (January – December) was balanced by cutting select complementary educational programming and one-time capital upgrades; freezing staff salaries initially projected to increase and planned new staff hires; increasing volunteer usage; and generating additional income from increased farm sales reflecting a new appreciation in safe food channels.

2. Observations on our CSA program

We noted an interesting trend: our total customer count increases during shutdowns and returns to its baseline when the economy reopens. Having said this, the overall number of baskets has increased, with more people requesting additional, large or jumbo boxes. We are also now distributing to a sales group in Haifa and the town of Ramat Yishai and are selling our occasional surplus veggies to other Kaima network farms. This has enabled us to become less dependent on external growers (common with CSA farming) to provide a balanced basket.

3. Shifting gears

Given the cessation of both local and overseas tourism, we worked to strengthen one of our most important educational and physical assets: the farm. We doubled the size of our fields to 10 dunam (2.50 acres), thus increasing output and further diversifying our harvest. With the generous assistance of one of our donors, we were able to construct a cooling room allowing us to better manage the harvest during the summer without fear of losing any of our veggies to the heat. Additionally, Project Lavender participants and national service volunteers established a small fruit orchard and a natural pharmacy workspace. Once groups return to the farm, we will have a new selection of programming to offer.

4. Obstacles

The primary obstacles we face relate to the need for additional funding to augment our current human and physical resources. Limited funds have challenged us to:

- a. **Strengthen our professional team:** While we launched the project with minimal staff, essential in the start-up, it has become critical that we expand our professional team by adding another adult professional to work alongside our over-burdened agricultural manager and a part-time social worker or psychologist.
- b. **Provide a National Service residence:** We benefit tremendously through the contribution of our national service volunteers. In order to recruit these young women, we must secure modest housing to enable them to remain onsite in a region with limited public transportation.
- c. **Secure additional capital resources:** Farms always need to replenish equipment to function. Each year we develop a special budget to sustain our physical infrastructure, though are challenged to finance many of the projects. Remarkably, this year we secured funding to purchase a much-needed used delivery vehicle with a targeted donation from a funder. All other capital investments were put on hold owing to the pandemic and the need to direct funding to our educational work.

5. Lessons learned

- a. **Farming is COVID-19 resistant:** Providing an activity as healthy and life-affirming as farming encourages purpose and meaning during difficult times. Many daily conversations with our youth revolve around nature's resiliency and all that can be learned by growing one's own food. Indeed, the pandemic reinforced our assertion that farmers are adept at pivoting to meet ever-changing conditions. Be it adjusting to harsh weather conditions, blight, soil erosion, or a change in market conditions, keeping a farm alive and thriving requires discipline and adaptability. This perspective has served us well as COVID-19 forced an evolution of our identity as a youth employer, service provider, and operating farm to a true driver of social change.
- b. **CSA farming is here to stay:** After a growth spurt beginning at the outset of the pandemic we have opted to maintain a more constant customer base. Limited human resources, the pressure to meet sudden spikes in weekly sales, and our recognition that we are first and foremost an educational program and not a business, led us to cap our customer count at a manageable level.
- c. **Restoring group programming will take creativity:** Given uncertainty regarding resumption of tourism, we are developing new strategies to encourage local groups to participate in our outdoor programming, reinforcing that social distancing on the farm is easy to manage.

- d. **We must do even more to reduce local food insecurity:** The limits of the pandemic urged us to get creative about establishing new ways of connecting to women. Since we could not bring the community to the farm, in a way we brought the farm to the community. Specifically, we expanded our food donation activities, adopting a home for women with disabilities and another for women recovering from sexual abuse. Both homes receive veggie baskets donations to help nourish residents and remind them that they are part of an eco-system of women caring for women. We also provide highly discounted baskets for an organization aiding women suffering from cancer. Given the economic shock triggered by the pandemic and its specific impact on food insecurity, a situation we project will become chronic for many, we feel compelled to do more. Our new “Feed my Neighbor” program will appreciably expand vegetable donations and model the highest principles of Tzedakah, empowering our participants as responsible, empathic citizens. Prior to the crisis, our food donations fed 500 people annually. This new initiative will enable us to increase that number to as many as 3,000.

Useful links

Link to homemade video (4 min) [HERE](#)

Link to January 2020 interview with Righteous Crowd (1 min) [HERE](#)

Link to July 2020 article published by the Times of Israel (3 min) [HERE](#)

Link to May 2020 podcast broadcast by the Good People Fund and featuring an interview with Kaima Nahalal Co-founder, Merav Carmi (25 min) [HERE](#)

Link to Facebook (take your time and become a friend) [HERE](#)

Kaima Nahalal thanks all who supported our work this past year and in the past.





Out in the fields – working together and a moment of quiet contemplation



Growing jumbo sweet potatoes (they truly are jumbo and deliciously sweet!) has allowed us to increase donations to more than 150 people, including women with disabilities, women suffering from cancer, women suffering PTSD, Holocaust survivors, and families in need!

