

## Gush Katif Evacuees Return to Farming in the Golan Heights

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Seventeen families from different communities in Gush Katif arrived in Moshav Avnei Eitan about a decade ago and began to build their lives anew. KKL-JNF, which has been helping them to settle in their new surroundings, has recently prepared 530 dunam (132.5 acres) of farmland for use by residents of this Golan community. This project, which was made possible thanks to a generous donation from Friends of JNF Canada Dr Max and Gianna Glassman, will help both families evacuated from Gush Katif - who have had to struggle to rebuild their homes and their livelihood after the evacuation - and veteran Avnei Eitan residents alike, and enable them to develop local agriculture and absorb newcomers.

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## Projects and Partners Worldwide

The preparation of the land for farming in Avnei Eitan is being completed thanks to the generous support of Dr Max and Gianna Glassman, Friends of JNF in Canada.

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**Yossi Haddad** arrived in Moshav Avnei Eitan in 2006 after being evacuated from his home in Kfar Darom. "Farming in Gush Katif has bonded us both with the land and the community," this veteran farmer told us. "It's good to know that here in our new home on the Golan Heights we shall be able to work in agriculture once more and renew our profound connection to the land and its people."

When the [fallow year](#) ends, the farmers intend to plant the new plots of land with vineyards and deciduous fruit trees. Working together with the KKL-JNF supported regional [research and development station](#), they are currently engaged in selecting the varieties of plants and trees best suited to the local weather and soil conditions.



New area prepared by KKL-JNF. Photo: Yoav Devir

"When the KKL-JNF teams arrived here over a year ago, they found the area covered in rocks and tangled vegetation," recalled **Shai Dura**, Director of KKL-JNF Northern Region's Project Implementation Unit. "The site is surrounded by minefields and there are plenty of dud shells and mortars around, too. This meant that we couldn't start work without authorization from the IDF that the area had been cleared of munitions."

Once authorization had been given, the heavy machinery moved in to level

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the area, the rocks were removed, vegetation was cleared and the entire compound was fenced in. But of course land on its own is not enough – farming needs water, too, and laying a pipeline to the new fields turned out to be no simple matter. The IDF objected to the pipe's being laid along the surface of the ground for fear it would impede tanks requiring access to the area, while the Israel Antiquities Authority objected to any digging that might harm archeological remains beneath the surface. In the end the pipe was laid underground, which, although more expensive, turned out to be the only viable option.



Yossi Haddad. Photo: Yoav Devir

Once building approval had been obtained from the regional council and partial funding had been provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, it was finally time to tackle the issue of the water supply. KKL-JNF buried the 1,800-meter-long pipeline underground and split it into separate sections to supply the various agricultural plots.

“We finished the work in good order, and once the fallow year is over the farmers can start planting the area,” Shai Dura announced with satisfaction.

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**Yossi Haddad, Farmer**

### Photo Gallery: Click on each thumbnail for the full image



In Avnei Eitan, Yossi Haddad grows blackberries and uses greenhouses for the cultivation of leafy vegetables. He specializes in insect-free kosher products such as cauliflower, lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, spring onions, chard and celery. Together he and his wife are also raising ten children.

He intends to plant the new plot with a vineyard and a deciduous orchard of plums, pears and possibly other types of fruit, too. “Farming connects us to the land we walk on,” he said. “That’s why it was so hard for us to leave Gush Katif. Now, however, it will help us to find our place here in the Golan.”



Gadi Kidron. Photo: Yoav Devir

**Gadi Kidron** arrived in Avnei Eitan from Moshav Gadid in Gush Katif. “I’ve been a farmer all my adult life, and it’s the only thing I know how to do,” he said. He leases his land from other families who choose not to engage in agriculture. With regard to the significance of the new plots he says: “Land is in short supply, and these new areas that KKL-JNF has prepared will be a great help to us. You need a good-sized piece of land if you want to make a living from agriculture,

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because the financial return per dunam is low and you have to pay for workers and equipment.”

In Gush Katif Gadi Kidron grew vegetables – mainly tomatoes and peppers – both for export and the local market. In Avnei Eitan, however, he has chosen to focus on peonies for export to the flower exchange in Holland. He also grows nectarines and peaches. “Farming is Zionism and it’s a way of life,” he told us. “The support of [JNF Canada](#) is very important to us, as will enable us to make a living from farming, the profession to which we are so deeply attached,” he said gratefully in conclusion.



Photo: Yoav Devir

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### Gadi Kidron, Farmer

