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Agriculture Offers a Link to Peace in the Middle East

By [Bonnie Stewart](#)

The Peres Center for Peace and the SDSU Fred J. Hansen Institute for World Peace, respectively based in Tel Aviv and San Diego, have launched a project pooling the knowledge of agricultural and water experts from their two respective nations, Israel and the United States, with counterparts from Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Greece, Turkey, Italy, Macedonia and Switzerland.



Shimon Peres, former prime minister of Israel, participated in SDSU President Stephen L. Weber's 1997 inauguration.

Egyptian, Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Moroccan, Italian, American and other delegates at the Peres Center/Hansen Institute-sponsored Integrated Crop Management, Market and Product Development workshop, November 2006, in Cairo.

Their common goal is to enhance the yields and develop new strains of such Middle Eastern crops as olives, dates, almonds, grapes, tomatoes and potatoes. Environmentally friendly methods of crop production are key components of this project.

Egypt, Israel Hosted Representatives from 11 Countries

The four-day work was launched last November when more than 100 participants —American, Egyptian, Greek, Israeli, Italian, Jordanian, Macedonian, Moroccan and Palestinian delegates — met in Cairo for a workshop on ways of improving water use, food production and agricultural marketing throughout the world.

The delegates recognized that such a collaborative program can lead to multiple benefits: safe and nutritional food sustains health, and economic partnerships promote peace. They expressed satisfaction that this is a concrete project – not just talk – with measurable accomplishments.

[Bonnie Stewart](#), executive director of the Fred J. Hansen Institute for World Peace and team members, [Sanford Ehrlich](#), QUALCOMM executive director of the SDSU Entrepreneurial Management Center, and food marketing executive Marvin Spira, were among the conference organizers and presenters along with Fred J. Hansen Foundation trustee Anton Dimitroff and Gail Dimitroff.

Long History of Partnership with Israel

Since 1980, the Hansen Institute has been working with Israel, including former Prime Minister Shimon Peres. The institute developed a solid reputation in the region for its work on the cooperative agricultural programs with Egypt, Morocco, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

Shimon Peres visited SDSU 10 years ago and delivered the inaugural address for SDSU President Stephen Weber. Peres was presented with an honorary doctorate from the California State University at that time.

Window of Opportunity

This project is built on years of relationship building. The project that was launched this past year will deliver sustainable outcomes.

Stewart reflected on the many years she has been working in the Middle East with the Hansen Institute.

"It is important to realize that peace is a process, not an end in itself – it demands constant nurturing," she said. "The Peres Center and the Hansen Institute have long established relationships that can be leveraged in the peace building process. There is a window of opportunity now to strengthen relationships in the region by building economic links among their neighbors. Such partnerships form the glue for a sustainable peace."

The Peres Center for Peace and the Hansen Institute for World Peace are allocating funds to maximize cooperation among regional scientists in the quest for food-for-peace solutions.

Next Steps – Product Markets and Product Innovations

Team members Ehrlich and Spira will offer their expertise in an innovative training program next October that will bring together Arabs and Israelis students and market experts.

They will conduct interactive training sessions of multinational teams to provide instruction on how to assess product markets and characteristics of the industry for olives, dates and tomatoes, along with methods of commercializing food products from the region.

For more information, e-mail or call [Bonnie Stewart](#) at (619) 594-5644 or [Sanford Ehrlich](#) at (619) 594-3956.



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