



Ismael ZAYED - Ben Zayed farm

Gafsa

At 27, Ismael Zayed has already established his reputation as a farmer in Gafsa, a region in central Tunisia where farming is a family tradition handed down from generation to generation.

After graduating in Experimental Sciences in 2009 and Applied Geomatics in 2012, it would have been a natural next step for Ismael to move to Tunis to try and find a job. Sidi Boubaker, the rural town where he is from, offers few employment opportunities. Despite the existence of investment support institutions, the entrepreneurial ecosystem also remains underdeveloped and aspiring entrepreneurs often face difficulties accessing information and support they need to create their businesses.

However, Ismael saw potential in his region and in the family farm, which combined with his respect and love for working the land, motivated him to stay. Seeing an opportunity in the growing demand for organic produce, he decided to strengthen the family farm through diversifying crops, offering new vegetable and fruit varieties with higher returns and also ensuring agricultural production is organic.

To develop his plans and put them into action, Ismael has received support from Mashrou3i, a project implemented by UNIDO with support from USAID, the Italian Cooperation and the HP Foundation. In addition to mentoring and technical skills training, participants have access to HP LIFE, a free, online program, which features 27 interactive modules covering business and IT skills training.

"I found out about Mashrou3i and HP LIFE while

talking with a friend and signed up for one of the workshops. With the support of the HP LIFE trainer, things began to fall into place; I learned new concepts, like the importance of promoting quality which encouraged me to convert our farm to organic agriculture. Since the training I have also diversified my fruit trees with new almond and pistachio plants which in a few years will offer a good return on investment."

Through HP LIFE e-Learning, Ismael also gained new managerial skills. Today, he is able to keep separate accounts for various activities, having integrated HP LIFE's technology-based tools into the management and marketing of the farm, which provides 6 full-time jobs, and seasonal employment to many more.

"The ancestral olive grove has always been an important part of the farm but since I've joined the family business we are meeting a growing demand from the wholesale market in Gafsa. The HP LIFE tools help me to keep track of profit margins and have improved the farm's productivity."

Very active in civil society in Gafsa, and as president of the Association for the Promotion of Development and Social Work, Ismael is also passionate about encouraging more young people to engage in farming.

"Many young people see agriculture as only hard work, but it offers many opportunities and is very important for promoting biodiversity. I hope that my experience will encourage more young people to remain in their region and to use modern practices and traditional knowledge to meet the growing demand for high quality, organic produce."