



# The impact

## of Israel's Agro-tech industry on Kenya's Agriculture sector

Israel is world renowned for its advancement in cutting edge technology, which has impacted the lives of many around the world in a positive way and has also had a big impact here in Kenya. The technology has rapidly transformed endless seas of desert into a world of agriculture, bringing hope to Africa. In view of this, **Israel's Ambassador H.E. Gil Haskel** had this to say, when interviewed by the Hortfresh crew.

**Q1. On a wide level, what would you say has been the impact over the years of Israel's agro-tech industry to the Kenyan agriculture sector?**

Today the most visible contact in Kenya is the floriculture industry, one of the leading if not the best, in which Israel has been very involved in developing.

There are many Israeli floriculture companies established in Kenya which bring together the winning combination of Israel technology know how in Kenyan conditions and very dedicated man power.

Israeli farmers realized that having differing seasons between Kenya and Europe turns the potential of flower growing in Kenya into a gold mine. Kenya does not have gold investments but growing flowers in Kenya during autumn and summer and exporting them to Europe during winter is better than gold, this has been proven by the Kenyan floriculture sector.

In general terms, the tremendous relationship existing between the Israel and Kenya business community basically means that Israeli technology is there for Kenya. It is hanging just for the Kenyan horticulture to come and pick it.

**Q2. Which Israeli innovations have been adopted in Kenya?**

Israel is very much interested in the development of the Kenyan economy and if we can assist in this development by exposing the Kenyan market to the technology development, we see it as a win-win situation for Israel and Kenya.

A visible technology is the green house and drip irrigation technology in horticulture of which Israel is the worldwide leader. These Israeli technologies allow a farmer today, almost in any climate to grow almost any crop in any season of the year without depending directly on the climate, soil condition or the amount of rainfall.

Most of what happens in Kenya depends on rainfall and since most of the year is dry, there is minimal return. Israel is very willing to assist Kenya in becoming non-dependant on rapid climate cycles or changes.

In Israel we grow in a semi-arid and arid desert and we grow the most tropical crops.

In the Israeli desert, you can find water melons, mangoes, strawberries, tomatoes, chilies, capsicum which are grown in artificial conditions; in greenhouses irrigated through drip irrigation that require minimal amount of water. In some cases these crops are even watered with the

blackish water and not sweet water (Water with high percentage of salt and minerals). This is not fiction it is actually done in South deserts of Israel and we would like to offer Kenya our expertise and know how in this field.

Imagine a day, when people of Turkana will not be depending anymore on rainfall for their livelihood, this is something we are keen as Israel to be a part of.

According to our Jewish religion and tradition, we have a motto 'You save one soul, it is equivalent to saving the entire universe'. It is from that point of view that we in Israel, as Jews believe in cooperation in the field of agriculture not only as an economic asset but also as a religious and philosophic approach.

With the average amount of rainfall Kenya has, the quality of soil and quality of conviction of people and farmers, Kenya can transform rather rapidly into a food basket for Africa.

**Q3. How would you rate the presence of the Israeli private sector in Kenya? And what has been the impact of this?**

We have greenhouse technology that we can find in certain parts of Kenya but we feel that there is more that can be done. The sophisticated drip irrigation system is being adopted slowly by farmers in Kenya and its very important to understand that drip

irrigation is not just a black pipe; each hole has sophisticated membrane and filters which allow full control by the farmer, of how much water the plant receives, the quality of water and the amount of nutrients that are injected to the water like soluble fertilizers; that is why they are different from the obvious drip irrigations.

Another innovation that is being slowly implemented in Kenya is Israel seed production which in itself is very innovative because the Israel seed companies develop seeds which are ideally adjusted to certain type of soil, with certain type of climate and allows maximum yield from each single seed.

Israeli fertilizers are usually compatible with certain seeds. Many times the soluble fertilizer will be mixed with irrigation water and fed to the plant through drip irrigation and this allows a totally identical amount of fertilizer to reach each seed and allow identical yield that is produced from each single seed.

In Israel we believe that each seed in each single plant deserves maximum attention. In return each seed pays back the investment the farmer put in.

Another is pest management. Now Israel agriculture is transforming itself more and more into non-chemical pest control that result in much healthier crops.

**Q4. How could Israel and Kenya widen the scope of their collaboration in the field of agriculture?**

We have to do much. We need much more of Israel in the sector, we have to encourage many more Israeli companies to come and set base in Kenya because the potential is huge and its market welcoming. We have to promise them economic stability and to expose them to the incentives that are offered by the Kenyan government. Without this pro-active exposure, the Israeli companies that can come will not find their way into East Africa.

My job is to describe to the Israel sector the warm and positive reception given to Israel by Kenya and to convince them that bringing their technology to Kenya will be more beneficial to their businesses than to any other market.



I'll do that hand in hand with my counterparts in the Kenyan government and well I think we will need to have more Israeli delegation coming and holding business seminars.

I intend to establish the long overdue Kenya-Israel Chamber of Commerce whose main task will be to ease and facilitate business connection between compatible Israeli and Kenyan companies.

One very concrete measure is to organize the largest ever delegation from the Kenyan agricultural sector to Israel on the occasion of Agri-Tech 2012 which is one of the largest Agri-fairs that is held annually in Israel. This will allow Kenyan agriculturalists the full exposure to all the latest Israeli agricultural innovations and technologies. The fair will be held in May 2012 in Tel Aviv.

**Q5. What must Kenya do to take in more technology and best practices from Israel?**

The Kenyan government should work out a set of incentives for farmers that should be exposed to the Israeli agricultural sector. This will encourage the different Israeli companies to bring their business to Kenya.

**Q6. One of the biggest brand names in this sector is Amiran Kenya Ltd, identified as an Israeli-Kenyan company representing many Israeli companies. Please comment on this?**

Amiran is doing groundbreaking work in developing Kenyan agriculture both on the technological front, bringing Israeli technology into the

Kenyan farms and also in agricultural education and orientation among Kenya's young generation, which is the foundation block for the future society of this country.

Know that Amiran Kenya Limited is doing this not only as a business endeavor but also through deep conviction for the future of Kenya and Kenyans, and I am very proud of their work.

**Q7. What do you say about the Israel Experience Expo?**

It will be a first of its kind. It is an opportunity to expose Israel to Kenya in the field of Tourism, Trade, Culture and general orientation. I intend to initiate a series of such events all over Kenya to allow every single Kenyan to learn the real aspect of Israel and what Israel has to offer Kenya as a nation and Kenyans as individuals.

I would like to bless personally all those involved in organizing the expo and wish all the best success.

**Q8. What would be your final comment?**

I am very proud to be representing Israel in Kenya. I think Kenya is undergoing a very exciting and courageous process of change. The combination of three aspects: the implementation of the new constitution, word for word implementation of vision 2030 and the entrance to election year; which I am sure, will result in a viable and solid new administration. All these three will bring Kenya into a different era. I am proud to be associated with Kenya.