

The Ministry of Agriculture Funds Illegal Farm Outposts

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Settlement Watch Team, Peace Now, June 2024

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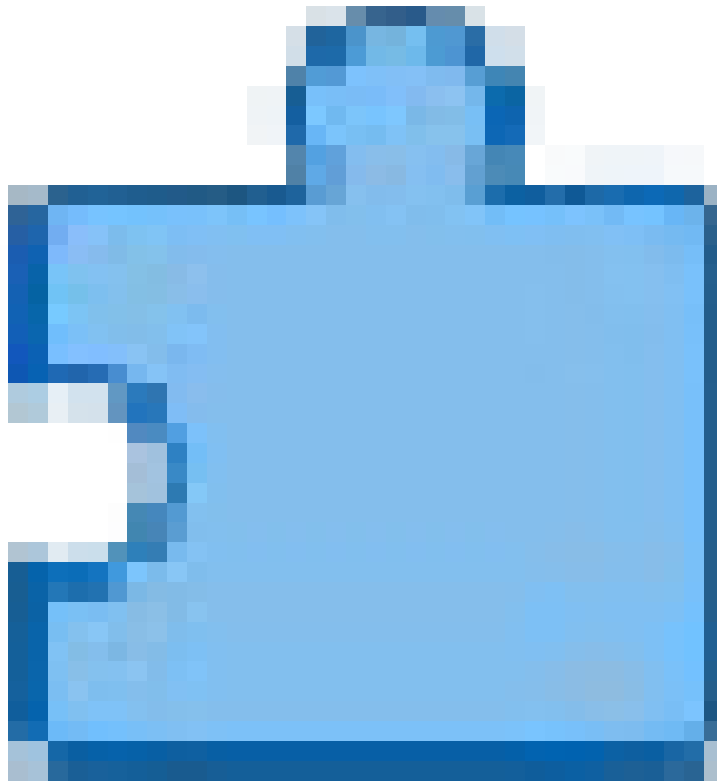
According to data from the Ministry of Agriculture, **support allocations from the Ministry for illegal agricultural farms in the Occupied Territories have totaled approximately 1.66 million NIS over the past six years.** Additionally, an additional payment of around 1.5 million NIS has been approved but has not yet been disbursed. Most of the funds were transferred as part of support for “Preserving Open Areas through Animal Grazing.” These supports are direct aids given to the outposts’ holders, **in addition to indirect support provided to them by funding of volunteer organizations** that send them volunteers.

The farm outposts that received this support are part of **a broader system of agricultural farms** strategically positioned to prevent Palestinians from accessing and reclaiming extensive lands in the West Bank. Notably, some of the settlers approved for this support have been implicated in acts of intimidation, harassment, and expulsion targeting Palestinians in their vicinity. The supports were approved before the American Administration imposed sanctions on violent settlers, among them three individuals who were approved for the Ministry’s support (Nerya Ben Pazi, Moshe Sharvit and Zvi Bar Yossef). Sanctions were also imposed on two of the farms (Zvi’s Farm and Sharvit’s Farm), while one of the settlers, Neriya Ben Pazi, was issued an administrative distancing order by the Israeli military. For more information on the farm outposts, see: “**The Wild West**” a report by Kerem Navot. Regarding the role of violence against Palestinians as part of land seizure through farms, see: “**State Business**” a report by B’Tselem.

For the list of farm outposts and the support approved for them, [click here](#).

For the map of the farm outposts, [click here](#).

Peace Now: “Settler violence is not a bug, it’s a feature. The dozens of farm outposts that contribute to the dispossession of Palestinians from hundreds of thousands of dunams in the West Bank are not marginal phenomena of hilltop youths, but are part of a planned and funded system supported by official government entities”.



Object 1

“Preserving Open Spaces through Animal Grazing”

As part of the effort to preserve open spaces, maintain ecological balance, and prevent development and construction within them, the Ministry of Agriculture encourages grazing over extensive areas. To achieve this goal, the ministry provides financial support to livestock owners who graze their herds.

The ministry explains the **purpose of the support as follows**:

“One of the goals of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is to preserve open spaces. It is essential for the ministry to encourage the maintenance and cultivation of open spaces to preserve ecological balance, landscape, and social contribution, as well as to ensure the continued cultivation of these areas by an active agricultural population. Preservation of open spaces involves measures such as fire prevention, prevention of land degradation, reduction of the wolf population, and prevention of unauthorized takeover of these areas.”

The criteria for support are tied to the size of grazing areas and the number of cows, sheep or goats. Cattle breeders may receive between 625 and 1,030 NIS per cow, with a herd of at least 50 cows grazing an area of at least 500 dunams. Sheep breeders may receive between 21 and 55 NIS per sheep or goat, for a herd of at least 100 animals grazing an area of at least 150 dunams.

The vast majority of support from the Ministry of Agriculture to livestock breeders goes to breeders within Israel proper, including the Negev, Galilee, and other regions across the country. While most beneficiaries of this support in Israel are Jewish livestock owners, there are also numerous Arab-Israeli

livestock owners who benefit from it. **However, in the West Bank, support is exclusively allocated to Israeli livestock owners and not to Palestinians.**

Support for Construction Offenders

One of the conditions for receiving support from the Ministry of Agriculture is that the herd owners refrain from damaging open areas themselves. Section 9.1 of the **support criteria** stipulates that support will not be given to anyone against whom an indictment has been filed or who has been convicted “of an offense whose nature and context make it inappropriate for them to receive support for preserving open spaces,” including “illegal construction in grazing areas.”

To the best of Peace Now’s knowledge, the majority, if not all, of the settler herd owners who received support, have erected illegal structures not only for their herds but also for residential and other purposes. It is possible that the Ministry of Agriculture overlooks this illegality or is complicit given the absence of indictments against settlers engaged in illegal construction. Ultimately, this situation implies that those responsible for harming open areas through illegal construction are allowed to “protect” these open spaces.

The Settlers’ Rights to the Land

Another criterion for receiving support mandates that herd owners obtain permission from landowners to conduct grazing activities. In Israel, this typically involves public lands (referred to as “state lands”), which are managed by the Israel Land Authority (ILA). Herd owners must present an approved contract from the ILA confirming their grazing rights. However, in the Occupied Territories, control over extensive portions of public lands (approximately half a million dunams) was granted **to the Settlement Division** of the World Zionist Organization.

The Settlement Division **manages the land with no transparency**. Even the Civil Administration, which is responsible for managing the lands, **does not know** what is being done in the lands it allocated to the Settlement Division. Over the years, it has become apparent that the Settlement Division has **allocated lands that were not under its control**, including privately owned Palestinian lands, contrary to the allocation’s purposes. Some of the problematic and illegal conduct of the Settlement Division has been exposed in **State Comptroller reports** and in **discussions initiated by the State’s Attorney**, but despite this, the management of the lands **remained in the hands** of the Settlement Division.

Given this background, it becomes evident how settlers have acquired extensive grazing “rights” in the occupied territories. They likely obtained some form of contract from the Settlement Division granting them grazing rights over thousands of dunams.

The Ministry of Agriculture is aware of the problematic nature of the Settlement Division’s work. Section 11.5 of **the support criteria** acknowledges this by stating: “Commitments to requests from Judea and Samaria will be preserved until completion of the legal examination and land data from the Civil Administration, as is currently accepted.” This means that in addition to a contract from the Settlement Division, legal approval based on data from the Civil Administration is also required.

It is worth noting that following Peace Now’s appeal to the Ministry of Agriculture in 2021 regarding the millions of shekels transferred by the ministry to support volunteer organizations assisting farm outposts (such as Hashomer Yosh and others), **the Ministry of Agriculture announced** that it only provides support for activities carried out in outposts whose allocation agreements have received approval from the Civil Administration. However, as of 2021, it was apparent that **only six farm outposts** had received such approval. It remains unknown how dozens more farms received support for

“preserving open spaces” and whether the required legal approvals were obtained. In any case, the legal approvals for grazing contracts cannot include approval for illegal construction which can only be legalized through planning procedures.

Supported Farms – Centers of Violence

All the farm outposts established in recent years in the occupied territories **present themselves** as “guardians of state lands” and are part of a system designed to dispossess Palestinians and prevent them from accessing extensive areas in Area C. The vast majority, if not all, of the farms, are involved in expelling Palestinian farmers and shepherds from the vicinity, some of them through threats or by calling on IDF forces to remove or expel Palestinians, and some even resort to physical violence. In the past year, especially after October 7th, **over 1000 Palestinians** were forced to flee their homes out of fear of attacks by settlers. In almost all cases they were in places where a farm outpost was established in the area.

Farm Outposts that Received Support – Examples

Umm Zuka (Nof Gilad) Farm of Uri Cohen

Support Approved: **595,808 NIS**

Amount Paid: **530,475 NIS**

Established at the end of 2016 in the northern Jordan Valley adjacent to a military fire zone (some of the structures of the farm were erected within the fire zone). Recently, the land where the farm was built and its surroundings were declared as a nature reserve.

The farm controls thousands of dunams which are used by the settlers primarily for grazing cattle. Residents of nearby Palestinian communities, Khirbet Samra and Khallet Makhoul, report that since the establishment of the farm, their access to extensive grazing areas has been blocked. The settlers also **erected fences** kilometers long, preventing Palestinians from accessing extensive grazing areas. In **a petition filed to the High Court of Justice in 2019**, evidence was presented of dozens of cases of irrigation, property damage, and expulsion of herds by settlers coming from the direction of the farm. Some residents of Khirbet Samra were **forced to leave their homes** last October.

For more information on the farm and testimonies from Palestinians in the vicinity, see B’Tselem’s report: “**State Business**” pp. 26-30.

In this footage, the farm owner, Uri Cohen, in uniform, arrives in a Palestinian community at night and threatens them. It is not known if he did this as a soldier.



Neriya Ben Pazi's Farms

Support Approved: **49,335 NIS**

Amount Paid: **49,335 NIS**

Neriya Ben Pazi has established several farm outposts in recent years east of Ramallah in the lands of the villages of Ramoun and At-Tayyiba. Since the establishment of the farms, shepherd communities in the vicinity have suffered from irrigation and threats by settlers. In January of this year, the Commander of the Central Command signed **an administrative distancing order** that forbids Neriya Ben Pazi from entering the West Bank for four months. On March 14, 2024 the American Administration **imposed sanctions on Ben Pazi**, stating that he “has expelled Palestinian shepherds from hundreds of acres of land”.

Rabbi Arik Ascherman, CEO of the human rights organization “Torat Tzedek,” **documented dozens of cases** in which settler herds from Ben Pazi's farms grazed on private Palestinian lands, including **cultivated fields**. **Aerial photographs compiled by Kerem Navot** show how since the establishment of the farms, Palestinians have stopped cultivating their land in the area. In recent months, two Palestinian shepherd communities, **Wadi A-Siq and Maleihat**, were forced to leave their homes following pressures imposed by settlers. **In this footage**, Neriya Ben Pazi is seen conducting a “search” in Palestinian property at night.



Tene Yarok Farm of Didi Amosi

Support Approved: **80,274 NIS**

Amount Paid: **42,850 NIS**

About a decade ago, Didi Amosi established the Tene Yarok farm near the settlement of Rotem in the Jordan Valley. In recent years, residents of Palestinian communities from the area have testified about the harassment and expulsion of their herds by settlers who came from the direction of the outpost. Didi Amosi, who was also the security officer of the Rotem settlement, **was reprimanded** a few years ago for attacking an activist from **the Jordan Valley activists group** who accompany Palestinian shepherds who are suffering from bullying and harassment by settlers and the authorities. Last December, a settler who came from the direction of the outpost **attacked two activists** near the Farisiyah Palestinian community, and they needed hospital treatment.

Recently, **a Palestinian family from the Farisiyah community**, near which the outpost was established, was forced to leave their homes.

In this video, Didi is seen driving into a herd of sheep and then attacking an activist and throwing his phone.



List of outposts and the support approved for them (in NIS) by year:

	Outpost	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total Approved	Total Paid
Yishai	Nahal Kana Farm						41,310	57,468	98,778	
n Pazi	Rimonim Farm				11,832	10,008	14,847	12,648	49,335	49,335
Yossef	Tzvi's Farm						52,650		52,650	
atan	Midbar Hever Farm							10,298	10,298	
n Goshen	Goshen Farm						21,336	13,583	34,919	
nglick	Tson Keidar Farm							3,611	3,611	
er Farm	Talia's Farm							4,999	4,999	
	Neve Ori						5,659		5,659	
a	Nof Gilad Farm						209,700	386,108	595,808	530,475
ohen	Itamar's Farm	19,209	20,343			18,330	21,080	123,600	202,562	
struction and ture LTD	Koko's Farm / Malachei Hashalom					16,864	15,581	59,163	91,608	
lital	Shirat Haasabim						17,707	53,782	71,489	71,489
	Eretz Zvi Farm						13,912		13,912	
gnezi	Magnezi Farm						12,043	6,379	18,422	16,387
Mann	Meshek Mann						14,997	6,000	20,997	
arim	Sculi's Farm	42,044	76,000			25,662	28,045	25,662	197,413	76,000
Yehuda	Yehuda Farm						11,271	18,641	29,912	25,766
sim	Negohot Farm			22,878		14,547	17,596	20,746	75,767	37,425
si	Tene Yarok		17,604	37,424				25,246	80,274	42,850
liya	Einot Kedem	37,884	24,431	143,007					205,322	
Yitzhak Popper	Nahalat Avot							32,468	32,468	
ma	Avia Farm							6,149	6,149	
inin	Hill 777		34,200	12,037			21,903	72,683	140,823	128,786
Fridman	Lechatchila Farm					14,462	15,253	11,747	41,462	41,462
nitz	Eretz Shemesh Farm						112,500	143,050	255,550	
Kelner	Emek Dotan Farm					18,330	18,147	26,460	62,937	48,016
uplan	Mikneh Yehuda						10,548	10,752	21,300	
is	Pnei Kedem Farm				136,180	28,446	18,397	8,708	191,731	68,090
Ran	Gvaot Olam		116,998					25,060	142,058	142,058
wartz	El Naveh Farm						10,048	23,527	33,575	33,575
Shwelb	Hashkedim Farm	41,220	126,604	31,871	25,896	21,904	21,904	21,904	291,303	276,110
haf	Meshek Shahaf Maale Amos						6,861		6,861	
echter	Har Sinay Farm				28,029	15,837	15,837	14,572	74,275	73,010
arvit	Emek Tirza Farm							5,949	5,949	
		140,357	416,180	247,217	201,937	184,390	749,132	1,230,963	3,170,176	1,660,834

Tags: Farm Outposts, Farms, Neriya's Farm, Tene Yarok Farm, Um Zuka