

KNOW WHAT'S HAPPENING: BEFORE IT HAPPENS!

## ARTICLES

May

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All

Filter

## THE NATURAL CHOICE



Consumers in the UAE are gradually making a move towards natural, organic products. Farmers and organic retailers are seeing a definite increase in demand for naturally farmed products. With constant media reports of children suffering from food poisoning, illness and allergies to chemically produced food, people are beginning to question where their food actually comes from, how it has been grown and what products have been used in the tending of it.

In Europe and the USA the demand for naturally produced goods has been growing for years and this is now being mirrored in the Middle East, especially as awareness of medical conditions like heart disease and diabetes grows. At the 9th Middle East Natural and Organic Product Expo (MENOPE), held at Dubai's World Trade Centre in December, there was a huge turnout of both visitors and exhibitors. Mr. Khorram Shah, Business Development at Alokozay Group, noted the increased interest in the exhibition and was delighted to attend as "it revealed to me the potential of organic and natural products and the growing business of this category."

Here, in Al Ain, there are countless farms and agricultural initiatives. The lush greenery of the city, compared to its sandy desert landscape, is a delight to see but did not happen overnight or without tremendous effort. Years of cultivating, tending and hard work have helped this city secure its name as the UAE's 'Garden City'. Aside from aesthetically pleasing work, there are many farmers and agriculture workers in Al Ain who are battling to produce naturally farmed products in order to keep up with the growing demand of consumers cited at MENOPE.

One such place is Al Khaly Farm in Zakher. Owned by His Excellency Mubarak Mughair Jaber Al Khaly, this farm is chaired on a daily basis by Mr. C.P Vijayan, an exceptional gentleman who dedicates his time and energy to developing healthy vegetation for the people of his city. We decided to go meet Mr. Vijayan, to a little about natural farming right here in the Garden City.

Mr. C.P. Vijayan is an Indian ex-pat and was originally an electrician. When the chance to manage the farm was offered to him, he put his professional qualifications aside and dedicated his mind to farming, with a strong focus on natural farming. Al Khaly farm has since grown to become one of the most well-known farms in the UAE, praised especially for its traditional methods and natural approach.

Greeting us warmly, Mr. Vijayan takes us into the farm for a look around. As the birds twitter in the air, colorful fish swim in the pond and the wind blows through the trees, it's clear that the farm is simply a beautiful place to be.

Explaining the concept behind his project, Mr. Vijayan explains, "What I am working on is 'zero-budget' farming. I do not import any materials from outside. Everything is from the farm and from nature." After five intense years of research, Mr. Vijayan has established many successful methods to ensure fruit and vegetables in his farm are free from what he calls "invisible enemies", otherwise known as toxic pesticides.

The farm makes use of fermented Moringa Oleifera leaves, a tree which is grown predominantly on the land, and cow-dung as fertilizer rather than using chemically induced products. This cuts down on concentrations of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium (N-P-K) that are generally used in farms around the world. As a result of this, Al Khaly Farms have managed to produce vegetation that is rich in quality, color and taste and is free of harmful substances.

The farm offers a plethora of information. Every piece of land, each shrub and every plant has a detailed explanation banner, which gives visitors information about the agricultural practices, the crops and the benefits they provide. Every inch of the thirty-five acre landscape is related, in some way, to the process of natural farming. The soil is rich in nutrients, thanks to the bacteria and fungi free cow dung fertilizer, the use of which produces beneficial bacteria efficient in destroying other damaging micro-organisms. The Moringa leaves along with natural sunlight and water pumped directly from the ground show an effective combination of nature and science.



Mr. C.P. Vijayan is truly working hard to sustain the increased demand for natural products. This is a demand that we hope continues to grow as customers should be made aware of exactly what they are consuming. The specialized knowledge and farming practices of places like Al Khaly Farm are important in helping the country's agricultural industry move forward. The decision of His Excellency Mubarak Mughair Jaber Al Khaly, over 25 years ago, to hand his farm over to the dedication and expertise of Mr. Vijayan, must be praised as what a worthwhile decision that turned out to be.

