

French farming experts study Israeli innovations

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Visit organization by the France-Israel Foundation gives 20 French agriculturalists insight into Israeli innovations.

A delegation of top French agricultural professionals may adapt the Israeli farming innovations they saw during a trip to Beit Dagan with Israel's Agriculture Ministry on Monday.

The 20 agriculturalists learned from ministry officials about the Israeli agricultural sector's goals and obstacles – such as supplying adequate [manpower](#) and remaining strong in the country's periphery.

Part of a week-long Israeli agricultural tour, the visit was organization by the France-Israel Foundation, a French organization whose goal has been to bring about reconciliation in the relationship between Israel and France, particularly through means such as culture and technology.

Just as a group of French hi-tech bloggers were able to understand “the technological dream of the Israelis” during a previous tour through the foundation, the hope is that these agriculturalists will be able to “discover the [miracle](#) of Israel,” Nicole Guedj, president of the France-Israel Foundation, told *The Jerusalem Post*.

Following the group's informational visit to the ministry, the delegation also visited the ministry's Agricultural Research Organization at the adjacent Volcani Center to witness some of these techniques in action, and went on to dine with Agriculture Minister Orit Noked that evening. On Tuesday, the group will be spending time in Jerusalem as well as several kibbutzim, and on Wednesday, with professors at Ben-Gurion University's Sde Boker campus.

Guedj said she hopes that the French agriculturalists will find real possibilities for cooperation and sharing of expertise with their Israeli colleagues by the end of the week.

“French agriculturalists are interested to know how this country that is in drought was able to become an agricultural [producer](#),” she said.

Many French farmers are therefore eager to understand and employ Israeli techniques in irrigation that have allowed the country to make an arid climate fertile, Guedj explained.

“Climate change, which touches the entire planet, was a subject that brought about surprise among French agriculturalists, who were not quite ready to [deal](#) with the consequences of this change,” she said.

Maintaining a high level of agricultural output will require that French farmers “redouble their inventiveness and innovation,” according to Guedj.

One way for these agriculturalists – who, for the most part, had never before been to Israel – to accomplish this task is to experience such innovation in Israel first-hand, she said.

Frederic Klauth, a farmer who grows wheat, barley and other legumes and grains about 200 miles south of Paris, said he was here for “personal enrichment” purposes and was very excited to witness some of Israel’s latest technologies in agriculture.

Meanwhile, Marie-Thérèse Bonneau, deputy general secretary of the French National Federation of Milk Produce, told the Post that she was excited to see Israeli dairy techniques on a kibbutz the next day. She was encouraged to see that the public research structure for agriculture and farming goals in Israel are quite [similar to](#) those of France.

“They said this morning, ‘grow more with less,’ and we have the same objective,” Bonneau said.

Critical to the week-long visit is the fact that both French and Israeli agriculturalists share many of the same concerns, and can therefore benefit enormously from continued contact with each other, according to Jean-Claude Sabin, founder and former president of Sofiproteol, French agri-food group with specializations in vegetable oil. Sabin, who was instrumental in recruiting the delegation members, said that he wanted communications between the two countries’ farming professionals to persist immediately after the visit.

While France has always been reputed to be “the” country in terms of excelling in agriculture, it can now do well to learn from Israel’s trials and successes in order to satisfy its own increasing demand, according to Guedj.

“Israel is not very well known in the agricultural world,” she said. “On the other hand, Israel gets a lot of interest in this world precisely because Israel has done the proof that it is capable of introducing solutions and anticipating problems that the French agricultural world knows today.”