

Israelis partner with Emiratis to address critical food-security and agricultural needs

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BY **YAAKOV LAPPIN**



A recent Israeli-UAE online investment conference dedicated to addressing agriculture technology and food security. Source: Screenshot.

(February 9, 2021 / JNS) A recent Israeli-UAE online investment conference dedicated to addressing agriculture technology and food security was driven by the objective of assisting the Gulf state in meeting one of its central challenges, which came to light even more so amid the global coronavirus pandemic, a conference organizer has told JNS.

The first-of-its-kind meeting on Jan. 18 drew 1,000 participants, including some 20 leading Israeli food-security and agri-tech companies, as well as a large number of investors in the United Arab Emirates.

It saw speakers address the burning issues in agriculture and food security, such as precision agriculture, desert farming, the development of resilient species and advanced storage solutions.

The event was organized by Israel-based Cukierman & Co. Investment House, Catalyst Investments and GoforIsrael, an influential series of business conferences in Israel. Headquartered in Tel Aviv, it conducts a wide range of cross-border investments in Israel through a global network of corporations, investors and financial institutions worldwide.

Edouard Cukierman, chairman of Cukierman Investment House and Managing Partner at Catalyst Funds, said building strong, long-term business connections between Israel and the UAE must be guided by an understanding of needs and reciprocity.

“The area of food security kept appearing as a most important field,” he said. As the pandemic continued, many Emirati businesses absorbed difficult blows in the areas of tourism, airline operators, hotels, property and oil, stated Cukierman.

In fact, the UAE government found itself at one point left with just one and a half months of food stock and a shortage of planes needed to import more, he added.



Edouard Cukierman, chairman of Cukierman Investment House.

With some 95 percent of food supplies imported into the UAE, “this issue of food security became vital.”

“Offering assistance is part of our approach, as we have done in Europe and China. Now, we are just starting to develop our ties with the UAE. It takes time to build this linkage,” said Cukierman.

The investors appear to be interested in leveraging Israeli technological food-security capabilities and creating a local infrastructure to boost the UAE’s local food production.

Israeli companies whose representatives addressed investors included Saturas, the first company to develop an “in-tree” water-intelligence system based on monitoring from within the plant; and AquaMaof, which employs advanced technology to create sustainable aquaculture solutions for the local production of fish farms.

Other companies included Ramat Negev Research and Development, which develops agri-technical methods suitable for desert conditions, and CropX, a company that upgrades farm decision-making by integrating above-ground data sets with real-time soil data, measured by sensors that transmit the data to a cloud-based platform to provide insights and automations.

‘Willing to invest in the long term’

The shortage in flights bringing in food during the pandemic became a highly sensitive topic in the UAE and helped make local food production a top priority.

“Because we want to be attentive to local needs, we decide that the first conference between Israel and the UAE will be food security,” said Cukierman. “We received a good response from local UAE investors who signed up to take part.”

A number of local investors have expressed an interest in flying to Israel when this becomes possible. Future cooperation could take a range of forms, including joint ventures, said Cukierman, with the ultimate goal of investing in a local UAE agricultural development or food supply capability.

Producing agriculture in tough desert conditions is an Israeli specialty, he noted.

“We are two countries that are similar size, open to the world, and there is a desire to develop that is very interesting,” said Cukierman. “In addition, we are warmly welcomed in the UAE, and that is not something that can be said of every country in the world. This creates a good atmosphere. We need to be sensitive to their needs and understand how we can contribute to their challenges, and be willing to invest in the long term.”

Ambassador Eitan Na’eh, head of Mission-Embassy of Israel to the UAE, also addressed the conference, stating, “The leaders of our countries have set the vision. It is now up to all of us—in the government and in the private sector—to make it a successful reality. A reality based on people to people, business to business, state to state relations, all in order to add content into our new relationship.

“From growing fruits and vegetables to jointly using health tech to combat COVID-19 and cooperation in space, he added, “there is no limit to what Israel and the Emirates can do together.”