

SEKEM *Insight*

SEKEM's Journal for Culture, Economy,
Society and Ecology in Egypt

Editorial

Dear Readers,

Products produced at SEKEM require substantially more manual labour input than those coming off the conveyor belts in large factories that run fully automatic. Since its founding, the SEKEM Initiative has always subscribed to the philosophy that more manual work within the limits of what is economically possible allows many more people to benefit from gainful employment that strengthens human dignity. Since SEKEM is one of the very few employers in the area consisting of many small villages on the fringes of the Nile Delta near the town of Belbeis, SEKEM can contribute substantially to the social health of the region by offering as many workplaces as possible. Especially young women are given the opportunity to pursue self-directed employment and to have an independent income. Many of them experience the production of healthy products as a special satisfaction.

In this issue, student Afdal Farid recounts her internship at SEKEM's largest company ISIS. She also tells us about how she came to understand the intricate link between sustainable business and sustainability education.

Your Team of Editors

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Sustainable Products

Education

Artistic Education
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More Manual Work for More Sustainable Products

Afdal Farid, a young student at the Heliopolis University, had the opportunity to participate in the work behind the scenes in SEKEM's largest business for 6 weeks. In this edition she tells about her experiences.



Afdal Farid is proud to study at the University of Heliopolis and thus to promote sustainability in Egypt.

In July and August of this year, I had the opportunity to attend a 6-week internship at ISIS, SEKEM's largest business and factory for the production of fresh foodstuffs mostly sold in Egypt. In fact, this internship represented the first professional experience that I had the chance to make. Previously, I had visited the SEKEM School on the original SEKEM Farm. The internship was part of my studies at the University of Heliopolis where I

have been attending courses in international management and business for some time. This year, it was important for me to know and understand exactly how the production of truly sustainable products work. I wanted to experience how it is to work for a company like ISIS.

I have been fascinated by the idea behind the SEKEM Initiative since my school days. Now, at the Heliopolis

University, all students support the idea of sustainable development. By attending this university, we have made it very clear that we consider sustainability to be key for the development of Egypt and mankind. However, it was only here that many of us began to really understand what „sustainable development” meant. By having the chance to actually visit the SEKEM Farm and many of its related facilities, we were able to get a clear picture of it. We all intend to support it through our studies and to later work to bring this idea to as many people in Egypt as possible.

I began my internship in July 2013 on the SEKEM Farm itself. I worked under the supervision of Mr. Andreas Kalbhenn who, as a German, has been supporting the work of ISIS here in Egypt for a few months. He attentively supervised my internship and has always helpfully encouraged me throughout my stay.

I initially became a co-worker in the area of quality control. I wanted to better understand how the product portfolio is selected and built. It thought it would also be important for me to get an insight into the various production processes that go into the production of more sustainable products. I spent a full week with my colleagues there.

Manual Work for Many People

In the quality control department, I truly got to know each step of production and processing. Of many of the individual steps that go into them I was not even aware before. For example, I was surprised by how many steps that are part the production of fresh foodstuffs at SEKEM are still carried out by hand. I had assumed almost everything going on behind the scenes would be automated. I was surprised and even gratified to learn that SEKEM still sticks to a relatively large percentage of manual labour in order to offer more gainful employment opportunities to people working in this poor stretch of the Egyptian countryside. For me, this is an important part of „sustainable production”.

In the following days, I had the chance to visit almost all parts of the food production at ISIS, for example of the spices, dates, and the organic honey. I even joined the staff for their work in the factories to discover how strenuous some steps of their work are and what skills one must possess.

After a week devoted to manual work, I visited the Department of planning, logistics, and distribution for local and international markets. Even customer service for clients in Europe was part of my work. In this area, Mr. Kalbhenn himself is working. Here, he is primarily responsible for quality control, as many others of the international SEKEM staff.

Here, during the following 5 weeks, I experienced the entire business process from an incoming inquiry by a European client down to the invoicing of an actual delivery. I had the chance to familiarise myself with the entire system through which a large company such as ISIS is operated.

Great Efforts for Quality and Safety

I was impressed by the international procedures and standards the company must comply with if it intends to sell its products in Egypt and overseas. Especially the control of organic food is expensive and countless checks must be performed to ensure that it complies with internationally recognized quality standards.

Through my internship, I have come to realize how important sustainable production methods are for the protection of our entire life world. Now that I better understand production processes at SEKEM, I can see how the work in the factories is related to my studies at the University of Heliopolis. My next goal is to do an internship abroad. I would love to go to Germany to compare working at SEKEM to another organic food company.

Afdal Farid



YOU CAN VISIT SEKEM YOURSELF:
WWW.SEKEM-REISEN.DE
WWW.AVENTERRA.DE

New Adult Training Courses Strengthen Social Responsibility Through Art

Once summer holidays begin at the SEKEM School, the art teachers start swarming about SEKEM's various companies to work with their staff through artistic courses. This year's courses offered creative experiences to 15 groups of approximately 12 participants each. Half of the participants are usually women. Each group has the chance to receive training sessions of about one half-hour on average 3-4 times a week.

The courses conducted this year focused on eurythmy in the workplace, painting and geometric drawing, language, and recitation. All of the individual topics were offered under the overarching theme of personal development. This comprised sensory as well as perceptual training, which can be promoted through the arts specifically as a basis for verbal and non-verbal communication and community building. Am I attentively listening to what another person has to say? Am I observing openly? Am I cooperating in an open-minded fashion? How do I consciously develop social responsibility?

Eurythmy in the workplace is primarily concerned with fostering cooperation and community-building skills and flexibility in the processes of give and take as the basis of social life. Likewise, painting trains everyone's sense of beauty and helps to open one's perception to everything that surrounds us. Geometric drawing conveys a sense of abstract structure and orderliness and stimulates creative forces. Through artistic verbal expression, one can also practice articulated elocution.

Especially during these days when Egypt is going through a period of social and political transformation, opportunities to train social skills are sorely needed. It is important that as many people as possible receive the chance to practice them.

Martina Dinkel

Impressions from SEKEM



In March 2013 SEKEM's Scandinavian support organisation was able to donate a total of 11,600 Norwegian crowns to the SEKEM Initiative. The aim was to support the setting up of a post of an art teacher at the SEKEM School and to allow a Egyptian music teacher at the school, Theresa Naki, to receive the opportunity to work part time as a choir teacher for children in grades 1 through 6. Over the course of the following months 70 boys and girls could now rehearse both Arabic and English songs. During the entire school year, the children were able to present their skills several times to an audience made up of friends and members of the entire SEKEM community.

The children greatly enjoyed the singing and especially their public performances before an audience. The singing, however, should not only be a lot of fun. It also provides an important tool to improve the personal vocal and listening skills and to develop a feeling for music, harmony and beauty. The public presentations of the skills acquired teach the children to employ their skills and build trust in their personal abilities. So, the choir allows children to enjoy the learning process and at the same time to show solidarity and social behaviour within the team. For this reason, the choir at SEKEM has turned into an important tool in characterological education and personality development of the youngest generation of Egyptians. But the concept works only when a teacher of trust can take care of the children permanently — an opportunity that was now granted through the donation, for which the SEKEM community warmly thanks SEKEM Scandinavia.

New App for Smartphones Connects Farmers to Consumers

A group of Spanish programmers is currently working on the development of a revolutionary app for smartphones that aims to directly bring together farmers and their consumers in the near future. „We want to revolutionize the food industry by creating a direct connection between consumers and their local producers“, the developers state on their website.



The app called GrowCrowd intends to connect farmers and home gardeners directly with clients in their immediate neighborhood. The app works as a virtual local market for organic foods (vegetables, herbs, fruits & nuts). Producers can autonomously sell their products directly from their living rooms without depending on resellers or other marketers. Customers can easily and quickly locate nearby businesses and products, enabling them to buy fresh food at good prices and promote local producers.

The developers imagine that GrowCrowd may stimulate customers to rely more on local products and thus consume healthier, tastier and more affordable food. By doing so, they also contribute to the independence and profitability of local farms. In addition, they reduce the negative effects of intensive, large-scale agriculture. The developers are still looking for financing for the project.

Source: Grow Crowd

! More information:
• <http://www.indiegogo.com/projects/grow-crowd-ios-app>

Organic Pioneer Pioneers Sustainability Reporting in Organic Production

Just in time for World Environment Day, Lebensbaum, a longtime partner of SEKEM, as the first organic company published this year an „A+ certified“ sustainability report. The „A+ classification“ is granted by the international „GRI Initiative“, an initiative that seeks to promote reliable and comparable company reports in sustainability.

The report by the organic food pioneer from Diepholz in Lower Saxony (Germany) complies with the highest possible application quality level by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) – just three other German SME's have also reached this level.

The GRI was established with the support of the UN Environmental Programme to create a globally accepted standard for sustainability reporting. Those who, like Lebensbaum, transparently report on all of the published GRI indicators and have their report certified by an independent auditor qualify for the highest application level „A+“.

The Smallest Company to Issue an „A+“ GRI-compliant Report

Year over year Lebensbaum monitors 150 individual indicators for its sustainability report covering nearly every conceivable factor from its CO₂ emissions to the catering for its staff. „It is expensive, but it is the only way that we can comprehensively and transparently make the sustainability performance of our company available to everyone“, says Ulrich Walter, the founder of Lebensbaum. „So far, we are the smallest company that has ever published an 'A+' report. Now we would like to encourage others to take this step“, Walter adds.

Source: Ulrich Walter GmbH

! More information:
• <http://www.denkmal-film.com>
• <http://www.rapunzel.de>

Event: SEKEM Co-Worker Speaks at „Münden Talks“ in Germany

SEKEM's Co-Worker for Press and Public Relations in Europe, Bijan Kafi, will speak on 12 October 2013 as part of the „Münden Talks“ in Kassel, Germany, on the topic of new economic development models in Egypt featuring SEKEM as a successful example.

The speeches and discussions of the two-day conference on „Financial Crisis–Land Grabbing–Nutrition“ shall enlighten the various dimensions of these and other modern-day land exploitation techniques and also illustrate the approaches of various diverse counter-movements. In addition to a presentation of SEKEM as a groundbreaking example of an environmentally sound agriculture, participants will be encouraged to pursue the fundamental question of how inalienable land use rights can become a reality for every human being. And finally: How did the financial crisis and land speculation influence each other?

More information and registration on the website below (in German).

Source: Social-Scientific Society

! More information:
• <http://www.muendener-gespraech.de/MuendenerGesprache/muendenergesprache.html>



SEKEM

Masthead:
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Editor:
Bijan Kafi, Christina Anlauf

Contact:
SEKEM-Insight
c/o SEKEM Holding
P.O. Box 2834, El Horreya,
Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt
insight@SEKEM.com

Pictures:
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