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Committee on Agriculture

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**AD HOC REPORT ON COVID-19 MEASURES TAKEN BY ISRAEL  
IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR**

SUBMISSION BY ISRAEL

*Addendum*

The following submission, dated 17 March 2021, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Israel.

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This ad hoc report covers measures adopted by Israel in relation to the Covid-19 as of March 2021.

1.1. The government of Israel issued various restrictions on commercial activities in order to reduce the infection and the virus spread. Agricultural production and related services have been excluded from these regulations. Similarly, governmental services in farms and ports of entry, such as plant protection and veterinary inspections, have continued, even though teleworking and focusing on urgent work were encouraged.

1.2. An additional water quota of 71 million m<sup>3</sup> was authorised for agriculture, so that local food production could guarantee adequate food supplies during the crisis.

1.3. Due to the spread of the epidemic, the entry of foreign workers and Palestinian workers into the State of Israel has been restricted. Therefore, expired work visas for existing foreign workers have been extended. A special mobility procedure allows a worker to move for a short period of less than one month to another farm. This flexibility was introduced as some industries, such as the flower sector, reduced their activity significantly while other industries greatly increased their need for workers, due to unavailable workers or increased consumer demand.

1.4. A special fund of 6 million ILS was granted to support logistic expenses of public institutions recruiting volunteers to replace absent agricultural workers. Furthermore, 12 million ILS were allocated to fund non-profit organisations that coordinated the engagement of volunteers during the first COVID-19 wave (18 March – 30 June). A significant increase in volunteers in agriculture was recorded during the crisis. In particular, about 12,000 volunteers participated in 87,000 workdays on farms during the first COVID-19 wave.

1.5. The outbreak of the epidemic and the isolation guidelines have accelerated the launching of e-commerce platforms, under the auspices of MARD and the Innovation Authority.

1.6. To improve food resilience and for contending with the economic effects on farmers associated with COVID-19, an Acceleration Plan is being developed. It includes R&D funding, investments in precision agriculture and yield improvement technologies, vertical agriculture, building of central and regional markets, the development of digital trade arena, infrastructure improvements in peripheral villages, soil betterment in the Arava region, agricultural water networks rehabilitation in villages, converting rainfed into irrigated areas, and building regional reservoirs for catching marginal water.

1.7. During the lockdown period, MARD conducted daily inventories of fresh agricultural produce, to identify missing items and facilitate their importation when needed. In particular, shortage of some basic consumer products, such as eggs and certain preserved goods was observed during March–April 2020. As a response, incentives were put in place to encourage importers to import these products as quickly as possible. For example, voluntary zero-tariff rate quotas for all WTO Members were increased to import onions, cucumbers and eggs. The Plant Protection and Inspection Services and the Veterinary and Animal Health Services have also facilitated imports by accepting copies of the original phytosanitary or health certificates under certain conditions.

1.8. An aid package was developed for agriculture activities affected by export constraints and for niche products for the local market. These include fresh produce affected by declining air transport, produce affected by the closing of the Flower and Plant Auction in the Netherlands, and by cancellation of orders. The aid is provided for crops sold fresh, and is calculated so that growers that were hit the hardest will receive a higher rate of assistance. The total aid should not exceed 600,000 ILS.

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