**Leket Israel Report: The “Swords of Iron” War Significantly Damaged Israel’s Food Security and Agricultural Sector**

**Data collected by the food rescue organization and BDO reveal that, increased food waste cost the economy approximately NIS 1 billion during the first six months of the Swords of Iron War. Due to agricultural produce shortages, vegetable prices rose by 14% and fruit prices rose by 8%.**

**In the first six months of the Swords of Iron War, an additional 150,000 tons of agricultural produce, worth approximately NIS 670 million, were wasted.**

**Since the outbreak of the war, hundreds of thousands of volunteers have helped rescue over 35,000 tons of agricultural produce worth approximately NIS 160 million.**

Given the current situation, Leket Israel’s *Food Waste and Rescue in Israel Report*, written and edited by BDO, included a special chapter addressing the impact of the Swords of Iron War on food insecurity and the agricultural sector in Israel.

The data show that in the first six months of the war, food waste cost the economy NIS 1 billion. Approximately 22% of agricultural produce was wasted, as compared to 9% before the war. Reduced access to agricultural lands and labor shortages exacerbated food waste, and the reduced supply of produce caused fruit and vegetable prices to rise. This, in turn, harmed people’s ability to purchase and consume healthy food and worsened food insecurity among the Israeli population in general and those receiving social support in particular.

The total cost of food waste to the national economy in the war’s first six months was approximately NIS 1 billion. This included NIS 670 million worth of wasted food, NIS 135 million in environmental costs attributable to food waste, and NIS 210 million in additional healthcare costs attributable to consuming less healthy food and the resulting harm to citizens’ health.

Israel has over 2.5 million dunams of agricultural land for growing fruit, vegetables, and field crops. Over 30% of the agricultural land lies in frontline areas of the war, with about 22% in the Gaza border area and 10% on the northern border (7% in the Galilee and 3% in the Golan).

Following the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War, the agricultural sector workforce (including foreign and Palestinian workers) decreased by about 40%. This caused an increase in food waste in the agricultural sector to 22%, compared to 9% before the war. In the first six months of the war, an additional 150,000 tons of agricultural produce, worth approximately NIS 670 million was wasted.

According to the Leket report, the shortage of agricultural produce caused a 14% increase in vegetable prices and an 8% increase in fruit prices. This damaged nutritional security and reduced the consumption of healthy food, especially among disadvantaged populations for whom the effect of rising prices is particularly severe.

Since the beginning of the Swords of Iron War, hundreds of thousands of volunteers have helped rescue over 35,000 tons of agricultural produce worth approximately NIS 160 million. The volunteers’ rescue activity reduced food waste during this period from 25% to 22%. Over 70,000 people from Israel and around the world volunteered with Leket Israel and worked tirelessly to help farmers in the fields.

The economic situation after nine months of war has increased the percentage of the Israeli population suffering from food insecurity and exacerbated food insecurity among those who suffered from it before the war. At the same time, food waste has risen. This highlights the need to implement a policy of rescuing and delivering food for consumption by vulnerable populations to ensure food security even in times of crisis.

**Gidi Kroch, CEO of Leket Israel:**

“The war has caused severe damage to Israeli agriculture and its consequences will be felt for many years to come. We are seeing a significant increase in food waste, which has caused food prices to rise and damaged food security. Regrettably, this war has further highlighted the need to implement systematic policy tools that could help during similar crises in Israel. Unfortunately, the government’s policy of importing produce was unsuccessful in solving the problems of rising prices or the produce shortages resulting from this crisis. The current situation makes it essential for us to strengthen local agriculture and improve its resilience for future crises. Further, the import policy may pose a long-term strategic risk to Israel’s food security. The time has come for the state to take significant steps to strengthen local agriculture, invest in advanced technologies, help farmers cope with the challenges of the current crisis, and develop educational programs about healthy food consumption and reducing food waste. Strengthening local agriculture is not only an essential economic need but a necessary condition to ensure food security and strengthen national resilience for Israel’s citizens.”