**Leket Israel Report:**

**The “Swords of Iron” War Significantly Damaged Food Security and the Agricultural Sector in Israel**

Data collected by the national food rescue organization and BDO showed that during the first six months of the Swords of Iron War, food waste increased and cost the economy approximately NIS 1 billion.

* **Due to agricultural produce shortages, the prices of vegetables rose by 14% and the price of fruits 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 to 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 the produce of the agricultural sector was wasted, as compared to 9% before the war. Reduced access to agricultural lands and the lack of labor exacerbated food waste. The reduced supply of agricultural produce caused the price of fruits and vegetables 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 first six months of the war was approximately 1 billion NIS. 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 harm this causes to the health of the country’s citizens.

Israel has over 2.5 million dunams of agricultural land for growing fruits, vegetables, and field crops. About a third of the agricultural land lies in the 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 workforce in the agricultural sector (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 to 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 food and delivering it 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 the State of Israel. Unfortunately, the government’s policy of importing produce was not successful in solving the problems of rising prices or the shortage of produce resulting from this crisis. The current situation makes it essential for us to strengthen local agriculture and make it more resilient to 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 the citizens of Israel.”