

# "It is now possible to grow vegetables in Saudi Arabia at a lower cost than imports"



The Saudi government's "Vision 2030" strategic framework, which aims to diversify the country's economy and reduce its dependence on oil, identifies food security as one of its key areas for action. Recent developments in the Middle East region, such as the blocking of shipping routes and rising transport costs, provide an additional incentive to produce locally and to do so now, despite one of the harshest climates in the world. This is the context provided by Dr. Mammad Zohaib Ajum, agronomist at Nehal Agricultural.

"With the current prices, it is now possible to grow vegetables locally in Saudi Arabia at a lower cost than imports, due to the dramatic rise in shipping costs," adds Anjum, "We can even consider exporting this production to neighboring countries and even Europe at certain times of the year, thanks to the sufficient yields offered by hydroponic greenhouses."

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Anjum continues: "It's in this pressing context that the installation of hydroponic farms is a strategic necessity, and that's what we're currently doing at Nehal Agricultural, owned by Khaled AlGhamlas. We are currently one of the few farms to launch off-cycle vegetable production, but we are available and ready to help other farmers who wish to benefit from support in the field of sustainable greenhouse farming."

"At the initial stage, we are talking about eight high-yield hydroponic greenhouses, covering an area of four hectares, for the growing of fresh vegetables such as tomatoes,

color capsicum, cucumbers, peppers, and lettuce. This is happening in one of the hottest places in the world, in AlKharj, in the Riyadh region".

Anjum describes the features of the new farm: "We are installing a highly efficient, UV-protected polycarbonate hydroponic farm. The soilless, environment-controlled greenhouses include light sensors, automatic shedding, temperature and humidity meters, and sensor-based fertigation. The project also includes cold packing and storing facilities to preserve the freshness of our produce. In addition, the project is one of the few in the Kingdom to include an R&D unit for experimental purposes".

"We are confident that the yield will be sufficient to cover the cost while conserving water and reducing environmental impact. If we take lettuce, for example, we'll have the capacity to produce 6,000 lettuce heads a day, given that Saudi Arabia is a major market for lettuce."

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