

In Israel, Composting and Recycling Programs in New Ecology Push

By Jessica Steinberg

Jerusalem (JTA) — The still-new recycling center in the Givat Shaul neighborhood of Jerusalem is fairly quiet on a crisp winter afternoon. Several people drive in to drop off their recycling - from old printers and batteries to aluminum pans, plastic containers and cardboard - in bins clearly labeled for each type of material.

These people, however, are the outliers.

Most Jerusalemites don't recycle at all. The city has no curbside recycling program and, as in the rest of Israel, recycling is not mandatory here.

"In the State of Israel, we're used to just dumping our garbage," Yakutiel Tzipori, a spokesperson for the Environment Ministry, told JTA. "We're a developing country and everything else was more important, like security and defense; the environment just wasn't at the top of the list. But now that's changing."

In 2011, the ministry received a relatively large influx of cash from the state budget - approximately \$74 million - that helped pay for new recycling sorting facilities, bins for composting in certain cities and environmental education.

It may be a long road ahead, but proponents of recycling say that little by little, Israelis are

learning to become more conscious of their environment.

Israel started its recycling program in 1999 with plastic bottle recycling cages on street corners, then a project of various youth movements that was later adopted by the municipalities. The government also implemented a deposit law for beverage containers, expanding a decades-old program that applied to some glass bottles to all glass and cans.

According to Chagit Hoshen, the marketing manager of ELA Recycling, the nonprofit organization that handles recycling collection country-wide, an average of 41 percent of plastic bottles were recycled in 2011. Once the recycling rate reaches 50 percent, the organization says it will build a factory for the production of plastic bottles containing 40 percent recycled raw materials.

It's not just bottles.

The government is spending some \$90 million on trial recycling programs for composting - separating wet and dry garbage - in 31 towns and cities, including



Laborers in Jerusalem collecting plastic containers for recycling from a plastic recycling container. (Yossi Zamir)

infrastructure and local education.

It'll be a while before Israelis in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem are separating their garbage for curbside pickup because those cities still don't have the infrastructure and budget for it, but they're already moving ahead with composting.

Jerusalem has more than 20 communal composting gardens where residents can learn about gardening and bring their waste to be composted.

Oded Meshulam, who teaches seminars on compost and makes and sells composters, says composting is important "because wet, heavy garbage is a significant

addition to the landfill."

Modi'in, a city of some 75,000 midway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, already is learning to compost.

With an environmentally aware population and the physical infrastructure to succeed, including large garbage rooms for apartment buildings and houses, as well as success in recycling paper and bottles, "we knew we wanted to cooperate," said Eyal Shani of the city's municipal environmental unit.

Modi'in is also home to Hava and Adam, an eight-acre ecological farm whose name plays on the biblical Adam and Eve and "hava," the Hebrew word for farm. Established by local educators, environmentalists and social activists as an ecological educational center, the farm aims to live by example and has always composted, recycled and built with all of its waste or trash.

When Modi'in began planning its recycling program, it was clear that the Hava would be involved in teaching Modi'iners how to separate their waste at source.

Beginning last spring, the farm and municipality began gathering forces, finding people who were interested in learning and teaching

kids and parents how to separate trash at home, using the brown composting bins being handed out by the city.

"When kids see me on the street they yell, 'Brown bin, brown bin!'" said Jo Maissel, a tour guide and mother of three who now goes to classrooms and private homes to teach them how to use the bins. "My son calls me a 'rubbish teacher.'"

There have been glitches, such as too much liquid gathering at the bottom of the bins (they advise putting a newspaper at the bottom), or confusion between the blue, brown, and green bins in the communal garbage rooms, but residents mostly seem willing to take on composting.

But Modi'in is an unusual case. "Just try this in a city like Beer-sheva," Maissel said. "It'll never happen."

Modi'in is investing approximately \$400,000 per year for the program, on top of the \$2.6 million or so it spends each year on sanitation removal. Yet there are the "hidden levies" every city pays for dumping garbage in landfills, Shani says. If the city really succeeds in separating garbage, its fines will be lowered.

"It's a project that requires a change of behavior," he said, "and that will be a big part of its success." ☆

When It Comes to Eating Local, Kosher Consumers are Split

By Chavie Lieber

New York (JTA) — The sun was shining over the Union Square farmers market on a recent chilly morning as Chris Mitchell, a 34-year-old chef at the fashionable kosher eatery Jezebel, loomed over a table of Jerusalem artichokes. The six-foot-something Georgia native carefully inspected the exterior of the root vegetable before buying a handful to serve as dried chips.

Mitchell comes to the downtown Manhattan market every morning to buy Jezebel's produce as part of the restaurant's commitment to purchase locally produced food.

"If you care about what you're eating, and who you are feeding your food to, you'll want to know where it comes from," said Mitchell. "That's the beauty of buying locally."

The locavore movement has become one of the hottest food trends in recent years, propelled by advocates who see it as a conscientious and environmentally friendly alternative to industrial food trucked in over long distances. Produce from local sources often keeps longer and helps keep dollars in the local economy.

But for many kosher consumers, both individuals and restaurants, limiting themselves to local food makes neither practical nor financial sense.

"It seems to me like another layer of worry I have to tack onto my food shopping," said Erin Reichner, a Brooklyn mother of seven. "The price of keeping kosher means I want to pay less for my produce. I buy plenty of

fruit for my children, and I don't care where it comes from."

Such declarations aside, interest in local food has exploded in recent years.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the number of farmers markets in the country has more than quadrupled since 1994 and grew by nearly 10% in 2012 alone. That's in addition to the growth of Community Supported Agriculture programs, or CSAs, in which consumers purchase a farm share for a fixed price in the spring and receive a weekly box of produce during the season. Basically none of these existed in the United States in the early 1980s; today there are estimated to be more than 6,000.

"The best way to cook is to have the farm dictate what your menu should be by buying local produce that's in season," said Gabriel Garcia, the chef at Tierra Sur, a renowned kosher restaurant at the Herzog Winery in California that purchases all its produce and meat from local sources.

Garcia said his restaurant's New Year's resolution is to procure all its food from suppliers within 200 miles.

"Food tastes better if it's naturally available," he said. "Like why would you eat berries in the winter from a grocery store when they are not in season if the winter veggies are hearty, delicious, and available?"

In the Jewish world, the trend

is manifest in the growth of Jewish CSAs over the past eight years, 58 of which now exist across the country, diverting \$7 million in Jewish purchasing power from grocery stores to local farmers, according to the Jewish environmental group Hazon.

"Our traditional laws can inspire us to think how we want to approach agriculture," Hazon's Daniel Infeld said. "The root of kosher means 'fit to eat,' and eating locally should coincide with kashrut."

Most kosher restaurants, however, are not on board with the move toward local suppliers. A Chicago restaurateur said he was struggling enough to cover rent, kosher certification, and the premium necessary to buy organic produce that adding the additional limitation of local just wasn't in the cards.

"I've been told that local produce lasts longer, but I can get a much better price if I'm buying in bulk from other countries," said



Chris Mitchell, chef at the new Manhattan restaurant Jezebel, buys his ingredients at a local farmers market, where the produce comes from neighboring farms. (Chavie Lieber)

the owner, who asked that his name not be used. "Plus, I'm in that category of local businesses and I need to take care of myself. I'm not in the position to spend that extra money right now."

Others say the issue is the hassle. With all the additional requirements of running a kosher eatery, local food is seen as an unnecessary headache. Moreover, kosher meat from local sources isn't readily available in many places.

"It's just not a realistic ideal," said Moshe Wendel, the chef at the celebrated kosher restaurant Pardes in Brooklyn. "It's not a feasible thing to do, and I would never recommend it to anyone who keeps kosher because it's a hassle when you have so many other things to worry about."

For many locavores, the impulse to shun national brands goes beyond mere environmental considerations. Consumers are increasingly conscious of their food's provenance and knowing the grower is often the most straightforward way to ensure that what they put in their mouths comes from a trusted source.

"If you are already keeping kosher, then you know strict discipline for dietary customs," said Jezebel's Mitchell. "So why not aim for the best quality? If you care about kosher and organic, you should care about local."

But that kind of approach is also limiting. For caterers,

who are called upon often to provide customers with an array of options, refusing to provide tomatoes in January could have a detrimental impact on business.

"Buying from areas other than where you live will supply you with a wider range of food," said Alison Barnett of Celebrations Kosher Catering in New Jersey. "As a caterer, I need to have the freshest produce, but I also need a secure and stable supply coming to the kitchen."

At Shopper's Haven, a kosher market serving the largely Orthodox community of Monsey, NY, Darren Klapper held up a package of kosher meat selling for \$25.99 that ultimately would become part of his Thanksgiving meal.

"I can't keep up with kosher prices, and then you want me to eat organic because the world is scared of a little pesticide spray, and in addition to that pay for peppers from a neighboring farm that are double the price?" Klapper said. "It's a bit much." ☆



Dozens of Jewish Community Shared Agriculture food programs throughout the United States are providing locally grown produce like the kale seen here at the Union Square farmers market in New York. (Chavie Lieber)