

Good Morning,

Thank you for your invitation and for your kind inclusion of Le Parcours des Saveurs in the program: we are very happy to be part of this forward-thinking workshop whose purpose is to encourage innovative ecotourism ideas and projects in Lebanon.

Please allow me to tell you a bit about Le Parcours des Saveurs.

My wife and I are both agricultural engineers: she is a specialist in landscaping and I specialized in animal production. In 1990, we founded an agricultural company that we named “Les Saveurs Campagnardes” and that currently includes “Le Parcours des Saveurs”. Le Parcours des Saveurs is an educational farm that represents the culmination of a series of projects that we undertook in the agricultural sector—a sector

that has fascinated us since our childhoods and inspired us to accomplish what, very often, seemed to be impossible tasks to carry out.

Le Parcours des Saveurs is located in Kfarchima, in the southern suburb of Beirut. Its services are meant for Individual visitors as well as for schools and students. They include

- A guided visit of the farm;
- A variety of locally grown agricultural organic products and foods that can be purchased;
- And a restaurant in which we serve traditional dishes prepared with the foods we grow.

We undertook the challenge of creating Le Parcours des Saveurs five years ago: we were hoping to share our experience with others who had little to no contacts with nature. The

project was a real challenge because we did not have the financial means to embark on it, nor did we possess the ideal location to build it. Nonetheless, in the middle of the industrial zone in Kfarchima, we were able to build a small green paradise despite the various difficulties we encountered on our way.

Such difficulties ranged from the high installation costs of the project and the lack of personal means, to its financing by way of high interest rate loans. Those difficulties were increased by other factors such as

1. The non-existence of any official status for an « educational farm » in Lebanon, which rendered impossible the financing of a loan subsidized by the Lebanese National Bank.
2. The non-existence of any regulation that defines the importance of such a project. Consequently, we could not

benefit from any official support: be it from the government's institutions, the ministry of agriculture, the ministry of national education, the ministry of tourism, etc.

3. As a result, the banking sector could not finance what it deemed to be "a risky project": in order to approve a credit, banks required exorbitant financial guaranties

Such hurdles, though frightening, did not dissuade us from trying to pursue our dream. We were also encouraged by our families and friends as well as by the positive feedback that we received from schools and visitors throughout the first difficult years.

Our mission is to restore the broken link between the new generations on the one hand, and, on the other hand, nature

and the environment. Today, as you surely know, a big percentage of our kids are totally ignorant of the origins of the foods they consume. The stunned reactions and, sometimes, the fearful expressions of children when they discover what a tomato plant looks like or when they are invited to pick a chicken egg, are alarming.

During these last 4 years, we have always aimed to share our passion for nature with the kids who have visited our farm: you would certainly agree that in Beirut, today, it is no longer possible to milk a goat, to shear a sheep, to pet a rabbit, to gather eggs, to pick tomatoes, or to feed a peacock—to name a few examples of the activities children can do in our farm. They can also feed a lama, ride a pony, fill a pot and plant a seed in it, experience the smell of the soil, learn about animals, and

most of all, learn to respect our natural habitat and the animals that share it with us.

As for the agricultural production: we have re-established the tradition of the « mouneh ». All year long, our team prepares a seasonal “mouneh” that can be purchased or consumed in our restaurant: natural juices and syrups, jams, milk products, honey, etc. We also sell the excess produce: depending on the month or the season, we offer a variety of organic vegetables and fruits that can be purchased on site.

When schools’ students visit us for educational trip, they are also offered a locally prepared breakfast. More elaborate traditional dishes, cooked with fresh organic ingredients picked from the farm, are served in the restaurant: our menu does not include any processed food or any sodas; Rather, we invite our

guests to appreciate the locally made natural juices or herbal teas.

For birthdays, we have shied away from the usual popular entertainments and introduced a new concept based on the farm visit and the subsequent interaction with the various animals.

All those services are offered in an idyllic green environment in which we have planted a variety of fruit trees, vegetables, medicinal herbs, flowers and decorative plants.

We truly believe that Le parcours des saveurs has built a unique reputation in Lebanon, and also in the Middle East and among the Lebanese diaspora. Indeed, those Lebanese who live and work abroad but keep their ties to their home country through social media, are very much interested in venues and places like

ours. When they plan their vacation, they often contact us to make reservations for their children's birthdays, or simply to organize a visit to the Parcours. It is thanks to them that the Parcours survives the slow summer season when there are no schools and students visiting.

In short, we believe that le Parcours des Saveurs has been able to serve as an educational and ecotouristic destination. Yet, there are still some difficulties to reckon with and objectives to attain:

- First, we hope to be able to replace all power generators with solar panels –which requires subventions.
- Second, we also hope to be able to get an easier and more appropriate access road—a project that requires the

cooperation of the municipality in order to restore the road access to the Parcours.

- And finally, we hope that the experience of the Parcours des Saveurs, which was able to succeed in the middle of an environment deteriorated by industry, can be expanded to the entire industrial zone in Kfarchima so it becomes possible to restore the Al Ghadir river that runs through the region and that is heavily polluted. By doing so, we would be able to transform the entire area into an eco-touristic destination.