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The Future of Iraq's Agribusiness From Challenges to Opportunities

Iraq's agribusiness sector faces challenges like water shortages and supply chain issues but holds opportunities for growth with the right strategies. The Wifra Program, led by Makers of Baghdad in partnership with ITC SAAVI and funded by the EU, connects business leaders and experts to find solutions. This report highlights key insights from discussions, offering a roadmap for strengthening Iraq's food and agriculture industry.



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Introduction

Iraq's agribusiness and food sector is at a turning point, facing both challenges and new opportunities. It plays a key role in creating jobs, ensuring food security, and attracting investment. However, issues like water shortages, supply chain problems, and competition from imported goods make growth difficult. Still, with better strategies, innovation, and government support, the sector can grow and succeed.

The Wifra Program, led by Makers of Baghdad in partnership with the International Trade Center (ITC) SAAVI Project and funded by the European Union, is helping to bring change. Through discussion panels, Wifra has connected business leaders, experts, and entrepreneurs to find solutions for long-term growth. This report shares the key ideas from those discussions and provides a guide for improving Iraq's agribusiness sector.

Objectives of the Report

- **Provide industry insights:** Offer insights from experts and entrepreneurs on Iraq's agribusiness and food sector.
- **Explain Impact:** Emphasize agribusiness as a key driver of economic growth and improvements in employment rate.
- **Identify current challenges:** shed light on key issues such as supply chain gaps, environmental threats, and market barriers.
- **Assess associated risks:** Address potential threats, including climate change, water shortages, and dependency on imports.
- **Deliver actionable recommendations:** Present expert-driven solutions to enhance investment, sustainability, and long-term growth.

Methodology

To ensure a thorough and insightful analysis of Iraq's agribusiness and food sector, we implemented a tailored structured approach designed to capture industry expertise knowledge and industry trends:

- **Focused discussions:** Each panel targeted a specific area of agribusiness or food production, allowing for in-depth and meaningful dialogue.
- **Expert-Driven Insights:** Our team conducted thorough research on industry leaders, allowing us to tailor discussions to their unique expertise and contributions leading to deeper insights and practical actionable solutions.
- **Targeted Exploration:** Through carefully crafted questions, we uncovered key industry challenges, growth opportunities, and market trends.
- **Knowledge Capturing:** We meticulously documented discussions, extracting actionable insights and expert recommendations.
- **Reporting:** Findings were synthesized into core themes, transforming raw discussions into a structured, insightful report.



Expert Dialogues: Insights from Wifra's Discussion Panels

As part of the Wifra Program, nine dynamic discussion panels were conducted to provide a platform for Iraqi entrepreneurs in agribusiness and food sectors to exchange insights and integrate into the global Ye! Community, powered by the International Trade Centre (ITC). These panels brought together business owners, public and private sector employees, and industry specialists to address critical topics shaping Iraq's agribusiness landscape. The discussions revealed key challenges, opportunities, and innovative solutions across various sub-industries. Here are the major takeaways:

1. Digital Transformation in the Fruit and Vegetable Trade

This discussion panel explored how digital transformation is reshaping Iraq's agribusiness and food sector. Led by Mr. **Aser Hasan, CEO of Al Tazej Fields Company and founder of Alwa Al Rashid**, the session examined the impact of technology on supply chain efficiency, market transparency, and trade optimization. With over a decade of experience in agricultural trade, Hasan shared insights on leveraging digital platforms to streamline operations and enhance competitiveness in a rapidly evolving market.



Moderator

Why is digital transformation in agricultural trade necessary today?

Mr. Aser

The agricultural sector faces many challenges that require modern solutions. Digital transformation improves supply chain management, enhances transparency in pricing and quality, and allows for faster, more efficient trade. It also helps stakeholders handle daily challenges more accurately.

Moderator

What are the main challenges facing agricultural trade, and how can digital transformation address them?

Mr. Aser

Pricing transparency, inefficient inventory management, and waste due to poor logistics are key issues. Digital platforms provide real-time pricing and demand data, improve inventory tracking, and use demand forecasting to minimize waste and financial losses.

Moderator

Who benefits most from digital transformation farmers, wholesalers, or retailers?

Mr. Aser

Everyone benefits. Farmers gain access to larger, more transparent markets, ensuring fair prices. Wholesalers streamline inventory and logistics, while retailers and restaurants receive high-quality products on time and at competitive prices. A well-integrated supply chain benefits all stakeholders.

Moderator

What role does technology play in enhancing supply chains?

Mr. Aser

Technology improves data analysis, inventory management, and demand forecasting. It also allows for real-time tracking, reducing waste and increasing transparency. Better communication between farmers, traders, and consumers leads to more efficient supply chains.

Moderator

Would rapid adoption of digital transformation benefit Iraq's export sector?

Mr. Aser

Absolutely. Digital transformation enhances product quality, expands market access, and optimizes distribution, making Iraqi agricultural products more competitive globally. This can increase exports and improve economic returns for the country.

Moderator

What are the current barriers to digital transformation in Iraq's agribusiness sector?

Mr. Aser

The main barriers include lack of awareness, weak technological infrastructure, and reluctance among traditional market players. However, these challenges can be overcome through training, modern infrastructure development, and support from both government and private sectors.

Moderator

What is the role of the Alwa Al-Rasheed platform in digital transformation?

Mr. Aser

The platform plays a key role in connecting farmers, wholesalers, and retailers transparently and efficiently. It improves operations, reduces costs, and offers smart solutions to enhance productivity and quality in agricultural trade.

Moderator

What does the future of digital transformation look like in Iraq's agribusiness sector?

Mr. Aser

The future is promising despite challenges. With continuous technological advancements and increased support from both government and commercial sectors, digital transformation will significantly improve Iraq's agricultural trade and investment landscape.



2. Iraqi Dates: From Palm to International Markets

This discussion panel explored Iraq's date sector with insights from **Mr. Maythem Saad, CEO of Barhyah**, an Iraqi agency specializing in date-based products. The session emphasized the need for innovative date offerings, prototyping to refine products, and overcoming packaging and export challenges despite global demand. It also highlighted the importance of international packaging standards, the rising market for organic dates, and the sector's potential, given Iraq's rich resources and cultural appreciation for dates.



Moderator

What sets your date-based products apart from traditional Iraqi products?

Mr. Maythem

Our focus is on quality and innovation, aligning with international standards of excellence. When we first launched, we conducted small-scale quality surveys, distributing samples to friends and acquaintances. Many people believed our products were imported, which confirmed that our approach to quality was working.

Moderator

How has Barhyah approached expansion in the market?

Mr. Maythem

We started with an online presence for an entire year before opening our first physical store in Basra. Our expansion strategy includes opening cafes and additional sales points to introduce more consumers to our date-based products.

Moderator

What are the biggest challenges in sourcing high-quality dates?

Mr. Maythem

The decline in date palm cultivation has impacted production volumes, and low-quality imports have flooded the market. Many farms also suffer from poor maintenance, leading to inconsistent harvest quality. However, recent government support to ban date imports has encouraged local production, and we are seeing gradual improvements in quality and availability.

Moderator

How do you see the opportunities in Iraq's date market?

Mr. Maythem

Iraq's date market is still emerging, and the potential is vast. With a growing population and over 630 varieties of dates, there are significant opportunities for product diversification. Dates can be used in more than 26 different food products, making them a versatile and valuable raw material.

Moderator

What role does packaging play in your business strategy?

Mr. Maythem

Packaging is a critical factor in product appeal. We invest in high-quality packaging to attract customers and adjust our packaging budgets based on product quality and target demographics. Some of our packaging is printed abroad, costing up to 60% of the product price, but it ensures our products meet international standards.

Moderator

What marketing strategies have been most effective for your brand?

Mr. Maythem

Marketing is the core driver of our business. We engage in community activities, digital advertising, and collaborations with other companies to expand our customer base. While word of mouth is slow, it remains one of the most effective tools for long-term brand growth.



Moderator

How is Iraq's date industry evolving in the global market?

Mr. Maythem

The number of date palms in Iraq has declined significantly, but there is a renewed focus on improving date production and quality. Fresh date demand has grown by 17%, leading us to introduce ready-to-display varieties in collaboration with distributors. While we have yet to franchise domestically, we are actively exploring international franchising opportunities.

Moderator

What challenges do entrepreneurs face in exporting Iraqi dates?

Mr. Maythem

Despite strong international demand, substandard packaging and non-compliance with global quality standards make it difficult to compete. Additionally, bureaucratic challenges such as project registration and banking systems complicate export processes. Interestingly, some Iraqi dates are repackaged in Saudi Arabia and then exported under different branding.

Moderator

How does Barhyah navigate production challenges and market demand?

Mr. Maythem

We analyze market trends to determine the most in-demand date varieties and contract farmers to grow those specific types. This prevents oversupply and ensures that we produce what the market needs, ultimately stabilizing prices and improving profitability.

Moderator

What is your vision for the future of Iraq's date sector?

Mr. Maythem

Iraq has the potential to be a global leader in the date industry. If we continue to improve packaging, comply with international standards, and expand innovative date-based products, we can significantly increase exports and elevate Iraq's position in the global market.

3. Innovation in the Tea Industry

This discussion panel featured **Mr. Wissam Sarmad, CEO of Harair**, a leading Iraqi tea company. The session explored shifting consumer preferences, challenges in tea imports, and the impact of economic conditions on pricing and market dynamics. Discussions also highlighted the role of electronic payment systems in addressing payment challenges and the effects of consignment-based markets on business sustainability. This session provided key insights into the entrepreneurial landscape of Iraq's tea sector.

Moderator

What inspired the creation of Harair, and how do you ensure the brand stands out in the market?

Mr. Wissam

We founded Harair with a commitment to premium quality and innovation, ensuring we provide a unique experience for tea consumers. Registering our brand with the Ministry of Commerce has helped protect our identity and secure intellectual property rights. We also focus on a simple yet elegant brand design to maintain a strong and recognizable identity.

Moderator

How do you approach market expansion, particularly in Baghdad?

Mr. Wissam

Baghdad, with its population of approximately 10 million, presents a substantial market. Around 500,000 people frequently visit cafes and restaurants, making them a prime audience for our brand. We aim to expand through strategic partnerships and by participating in events to increase visibility and customer engagement.

Moderator

What strategies have been most effective in marketing Harair products?

Mr. Wissam

Digital marketing has been a key driver for our growth. We utilize social media platforms for organic promotion, share user-generated content to build engagement and collaborate with businesses to expand our audience. Although word-of-mouth marketing is slower, it remains a powerful tool for long-term brand recognition.

Moderator

How do you ensure the quality of your tea products?

Mr. Wissam

We prioritize high-quality raw materials and continuously refine our offerings based on customer feedback. Challenges are viewed as opportunities for growth, allowing us to innovate and improve our products while maintaining consistency.



Moderator

What are the key challenges in distributing tea products in Iraq?

Mr. Wissam

Delays in payment from retail companies and the lack of high-quality packaging facilities in Iraq are two major challenges. Many store owners rely on consignment sales, leading to payment delays. Additionally, packaging options in Iraq are limited, making it necessary to source high-quality materials from abroad.

Moderator

How do you see Harair expanding beyond Baghdad?

Mr. Wissam

Our expansion plan includes opening new branches in different Iraqi cities and internationally while maintaining the same quality and brand values. We also plan to distribute our products to hotels, restaurants, and major markets to reach a wider audience.



Moderator

How do you select locations for new stores, and what advantages do remote locations offer?

Mr. Wissam

Remote locations offer privacy, available parking, and lower rental costs compared to central areas. This allows us to invest more in product quality and customer experience while maintaining affordability.

Moderator

How does Harair contribute to the local economy and workforce?

Mr. Wissam

We actively hire university students, as they have strong communication skills and professionalism due to their educational environment. Providing job opportunities for students also strengthens the local economy and fosters a professional workforce.

Moderator

What impact does Iraq's reliance on imported tea have on the industry?

Mr. Wissam

Since Iraq's climate is unsuitable for tea cultivation, we rely entirely on imported raw materials. This makes businesses vulnerable to exchange rate fluctuations and import delays, affecting product availability and pricing.

Moderator

What is your vision for the future of Iraq's tea industry?

Mr. Wissam

We see significant growth opportunities in the tea sector, particularly in diversifying product offerings and expanding beyond Baghdad. By maintaining quality, investing in branding, and overcoming logistical challenges, Iraq's tea industry can flourish both locally and internationally.

4. Digitalization in the Hospitality and Restaurant Sector

This discussion panel featured **Mr. Ali Shamari, Commercial Director of Al Amin Group**, with 19 years of experience in project management and IT training. The session explored digital transformation in the hospitality and restaurant sector, focusing on digital payments, supply chain optimization, and technology's role in enhancing customer experiences. Mr. Ali Shamari highlighted how digital tools streamline operations, improve financial transparency, and drive business growth. The discussion also covered Iraq's expanding retail sector and the potential for digitalization to boost efficiency and innovation.

Moderator

How is Iraq's food sector evolving, and what makes it a promising investment opportunity?

Mr. Ali

The food sector in Iraq is witnessing significant development driven by competition, despite the lack of substantial support. This competition fosters innovation and efficiency, making the sector one of the most promising for investment. The demand for quality food services continues to grow, providing opportunities for both new and existing businesses.

Moderator

How has consumer behavior changed in the hospitality and restaurant industry post-pandemic?

Mr. Ali

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly shifted consumer behavior. More people now prefer takeaway and delivery services over dining in. This change has led to the rise of delivery-focused restaurants and cloud kitchens, which eliminate the need for physical dining spaces while maximizing efficiency.

Moderator

What are the key strategies for restaurant management and performance improvement?

Mr. Ali

One of the most effective strategies is menu optimization. Expanding the menu too much can lead to waste, so focusing on enhancing the quality and value of each dish strengthens brand identity. Additionally, analytical tools can help restaurants identify inefficiencies and cut unnecessary costs, yet many businesses fail to utilize the data available to them effectively.

Moderator

What role do digital payment systems play in the industry, and what challenges exist in adopting them?

Mr. Ali

Digital payment methods, especially prepayment options, help reduce financial losses and enhance transparency. However, some businesses struggle with adopting these technologies due to a lack of familiarity or infrastructure challenges. The government now requires electronic payment systems for restaurant licensing, which should accelerate adoption.



Moderator

What are the challenges restaurants face when working with food delivery companies?

Mr. Ali

One major challenge is data control. Many delivery companies monopolize customer data and use it for their own benefit without sharing insights with restaurants. To address this, some restaurants are establishing in-house delivery teams, allowing them to retain data ownership and streamline operations.

Moderator

What advice do you have for investors considering the restaurant industry?

Mr. Ali

Opening a dine-in restaurant requires significant expertise. Without prior experience, it's advisable to avoid such ventures. The market for dine-in restaurants in Iraq is valued at approximately \$20 million annually, but proper knowledge of operations and customer expectations is crucial for success.

Moderator

What marketing strategies are most effective for restaurant businesses?

Mr. Ali

Targeted advertising is key. Restaurants should focus on high-performing areas like "hot tables" and allocate internal advertisements strategically. Smart ad distribution ensures maximum reach and customer engagement without unnecessary spending.

Moderator

How does the absence of consumer protection laws impact the restaurant industry?

Mr. Ali

The lack of consumer protection laws makes it difficult for customers to hold businesses accountable for poor service or low-quality food. Strengthening regulations would not only protect consumers but also improve trust and standards in the industry.

Moderator

What is the future of automation and digitalization in Iraq's hospitality sector?

Mr. Ali

Iraq currently ranks 131 out of 132 countries in adopting automation systems, but digitalization is steadily improving. Electronic payment solutions and data analytics are becoming more widespread, allowing businesses to optimize operations and enhance customer loyalty.

Moderator

What are the biggest emerging trends in Iraq's restaurant industry?

Mr. Ali

Cloud kitchens are gaining popularity as they reduce overhead costs and focus purely on delivery. Additionally, the rapid expansion of supermarkets and retail food services is expected to continue until at least 2028, providing further opportunities for investment and innovation.



5. Supply Chain and Retail Dynamics with Amira Market

This discussion panel featured **Mr. Mohammed Abdullah Jaber, Commercial Manager of Amira Supermarket Chain**, with seven years of experience in retail chain management. The session explored Iraq's evolving supply chain landscape, emphasizing efficient logistics, supplier relations, and the increasing role of digitalization. Mr. Jaber highlighted investment opportunities and strategies to enhance retail efficiency, reduce waste, and improve customer satisfaction in a competitive market.

Moderator

How does Amira Market use technology to improve retail operations?

Mr. Mohammed

We leverage technology for performance evaluation, enhancing customer satisfaction and trust. Data-driven decisions help us optimize inventory, pricing, and product placement.

Moderator

What is Amira Market's strategy for launching new products?

Mr. Mohammed

We introduce new products in select branches to assess market response before wider distribution. This strategy helps stabilize pricing while ensuring product demand aligns with location-specific needs.

Moderator

How does Amira Market benefit from producing private label products?

Mr. Mohammed

Private label products increase profitability by integrating production and sales revenue. Quality assurance is key to ensuring these products meet customer expectations.

Moderator

What are the key expansion plans for Amira Market?

Mr. Mohammed

We aim to expand to 1,400 branches across Iraq. Our expansion team follows a structured checklist to identify optimal locations based on market potential and logistical feasibility.

Moderator

How do cash flow and inventory management impact operations?

Mr. Mohammed

Poor cash flow or inventory mismanagement can lead to significant losses. Timely decision-making is crucial to maintaining operational efficiency and staying ahead of competitors.



Moderator

How does Amira Market adapt to different branch locations?

Mr. Mohammed

We tailor product assortments based on each branch's location. For example, branches near schools stock specific items suited to student needs.

Moderator

How does Amira Market support local products?

Mr. Mohammed

While local products may be priced higher, we focus on quality to enhance their value. Supporting local suppliers strengthens Iraq's economy and reduces reliance on imports.

Moderator

What are the challenges of supermarket retail in Iraq?

Mr. Mohammed

Managing payment processes, pricing strategies, and minimizing waste are ongoing challenges. Additionally, supermarkets need efficient supply chain management to meet consumer demands.

Moderator

How do consumer trends impact product sales?

Mr. Mohammed

Certain products have seasonal or time-based demand spikes. For instance, rice and cooking oil sales increase during the day, while cigarettes and energy drinks sell more after midnight. We use specialized data systems to analyze these trends.

Moderator

How has Amira Market adopted digital payment systems?

Mr. Mohammed

We introduced electronic payment systems across all branches, but consumer adoption remains slow. Raising awareness and improving accessibility are key to increasing usage.



6. Quality Management in the Food Sector

This discussion panel featured **Dr. Zaid Akram Thabet**, Assistant Professor at Al-Nahrain University, with over 20 years of experience in food safety. A **consultant** and **auditor** for **ISO 22000**, Dr. Thabet has worked with major companies, including KFC and Pizza Hut. The session focused on compliance with international safety standards, modern auditing techniques, and strategies to strengthen food quality control in Iraq. He emphasized regulatory frameworks, advanced testing methods, and industry collaboration to elevate food safety and consumer trust.

Moderator

Why is quality management essential in the food industry?

Dr. Zaid

Quality management ensures product consistency, safety, and consumer trust. Rather than relying solely on quality control, businesses should implement sustainable practices to reduce costs and enhance their reputation.

Moderator

What are the key quality certifications businesses should consider?

Dr. Zaid

General certifications include ISO 22000 for food safety and FSSC 22000 for large-scale restaurant chains like KFC. In agriculture, Global GAP is required for export compliance, while the BRS certification is necessary for exporting to the UK.

Moderator

How accessible are quality standards for small businesses?

Dr. Zaid

Quality standards can be tailored to any business size. Consulting firms and academic experts can assist in implementation, and a proposed advisory platform could offer ongoing quality consultation for SMEs.



Moderator

How is food quality monitored in Iraq?

Dr. Zaid

The Health Control Department and Health Laboratory conduct inspections, while the Ministry of Agriculture oversees standards for agricultural and livestock products. Businesses should proactively align with these regulations.

Moderator

How can collaboration improve quality standards?

Dr. Zaid

Industry-wide cooperation helps shape regulations and ensures fair competition. Establishing a Quality Assurance Department within companies, directly linked to top management, strengthens accountability.

Moderator

What are key frameworks for maintaining quality?

Dr. Zaid

Businesses should adopt Good Hygiene Practice (GHP) and Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) while applying Risk-Based Thinking under HLS standards to identify and mitigate operational risks.

Moderator

How can businesses obtain quality certifications in Iraq?

Dr. Zaid

Certifications are available through the Accreditation Authority in Rusafa and can also be purchased online for \$50-\$60. Gulf GSO standards are accessible via the Central Organization for Standardization and Quality Control in Jadriya.

Moderator

What role do quality certifications play in marketing?

Dr. Zaid

They enhance brand credibility, particularly since consumers lack the time to assess product quality themselves. British and German certifications are widely recognized due to their stringent standards.

Moderator

When should businesses implement quality standards?

Dr. Zaid

Early adoption is crucial. Delaying compliance increases costs and operational challenges. The Iraqi government is developing a digital platform to provide businesses with regulatory guidelines.

Moderator

What initiatives are underway to enhance food safety in Iraq?

Dr. Zaid

I am collaborating with the Ministry of Health on a multi-phase project to assess food businesses, launch an online regulatory platform, and introduce tax incentives for quality-compliant businesses. This initiative aims to strengthen food safety standards while reducing unnecessary inspections.



7. E-Commerce and FMCG Supply Chain

This discussion panel featured **Mr. Khalid AL Saady, Founder and CEO of Jaamila.com**, with 12 years of experience in financial and supply chain management. Holding degrees in Statistics and Leadership, he shared insights on Iraq's e-commerce transformation, challenges in FMCG supply chains, and the role of digital infrastructure in logistics. Mr. Al-Saadi emphasized data-driven decision-making, efficient supply chain solutions, and investment strategies to help businesses thrive in Iraq's evolving digital marketplace.



Moderator

How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact Jaamila.com?

Mr. Khaled

The pandemic accelerated our platform's growth as demand for streamlined supply chain solutions increased. It highlighted the need for efficient distribution and digital ordering systems in Iraq's FMCG sector.

Moderator

What are the biggest economic challenges you have faced?

Mr. Khaled

Price fluctuations negatively impact locally produced goods, and many traders are still unprepared for electronic payments. We addressed cash flow shortages by implementing a buyer assessment system, allowing deferred payments based on reliability.

Moderator

How did Jaamila.com grow in its early stages?

Mr. Khaled

We launched with high-demand products, like Lay's chips, at slight discounts to attract customers. Efficient order fulfillment was achieved by segmenting Baghdad into zones, optimizing delivery routes, and leveraging traffic congestion as an advantage to increase retailer reliance on our platform.

Moderator

How does your platform specialize and reduce costs?

Mr. Khaled

We enhance efficiency by outsourcing certain operations and avoiding volatile-priced products to maintain profitability. Building direct supplier relationships also helps us secure competitive pricing.

Moderator

What is your approach to hiring and human resource management?

Mr. Khaled

We prioritize passionate, fast-learning candidates over those with extensive experience. Our recruitment process focuses on adaptability, research skills, and innovation potential, with rapid promotions to keep employees motivated.

Moderator

How would you describe Iraq's investment climate?

Mr. Khaled

Investors in Iraq prefer low-risk ventures with stable profits and clear expansion plans. The lack of legal guarantees makes attracting investment difficult, limiting growth in high-potential sectors like FMCG.

Moderator

What are Jaamila.com future expansion plans?

Mr. Khaled

We are developing a consumer-focused app, allowing individuals to purchase at retail prices, separate from our wholesale platform. Additionally, market trends indicate a shift from small retail shops to supermarkets, which we are preparing for.

Moderator

How does technology adoption impact Iraq's FMCG supply chain?

Mr. Khaled

Many businesses remain unaware of the benefits of digital solutions in supply chain management. However, the pandemic accelerated digital adoption, building trust between suppliers, traders, and retailers.

Moderator

What are the key logistical challenges in Iraq's FMCG sector?

Mr. Khaled

Traffic congestion and driver shortages complicate sourcing for small retailers. Frequent price fluctuations create instability, making it difficult for businesses to plan inventory effectively.

Moderator

What is Jaamila.com long-term vision?

Mr. Khaled

We aim to specialize further, offer high-quality services, strengthen supplier partnerships, and continuously enhance the experience for both employees and customers.



8. Technology and Innovation in Mushroom Farming

This discussion panel featured **Mr. Haider Dawood, Managing Director of Al-Wadaq Agricultural Investment Company** and owner of **Al-Wadaq Mushroom Farm**. With 14 years of experience in edible mushroom cultivation, he discussed modernizing Iraq's mushroom industry. Holding a Mechanical Engineering degree from Al-Mustansiriya University and a certification from Dalsem, a Dutch expert in mushroom farm design, he highlighted the need for quality compost, improved local seed production, and advanced farming techniques. The session explored investment strategies, sustainable practices, and Iraq's potential to reduce reliance on imports.



Moderator

What are the main challenges facing mushroom farming in Iraq?

Mr. Haider

The biggest challenges include limited access to quality compost, inadequate local seed production, and outdated farming techniques. Additionally, market awareness about the benefits of mushroom consumption remains low.

Moderator

How can Iraq reduce its reliance on imported mushroom products?

Mr. Haider

Investing in local seed production and compost manufacturing will allow farmers to produce mushrooms independently. Expanding technological advancements in climate-controlled farming will also help ensure consistent yields.

Moderator

What role does technology play in modern mushroom farming?

Mr. Haider

Technology enables precise climate control, efficient water usage, and optimized growing conditions, leading to higher yields and better product quality. Advanced monitoring systems also help reduce waste and improve resource efficiency.

Moderator

How can small-scale farmers enter the mushroom industry?

Mr. Haider

Small-scale farmers should start with low-cost, controlled environments, use locally sourced materials where possible, and focus on high-demand varieties. Partnering with local markets and restaurants can help create a steady customer base.

Moderator

What investment opportunities exist in Iraq's mushroom sector?

Mr. Haider

There are opportunities in compost production, farm expansion, and specialized equipment manufacturing. Investors can also explore partnerships with agricultural institutions to support research and development.

Moderator

What sustainable practices can be applied to mushroom farming?

Mr. Haider

Using agricultural waste as compost, optimizing water use through recirculation systems, and implementing energy-efficient climate control methods can significantly improve sustainability.

Moderator

What are the key factors for ensuring high-quality mushroom production?

Mr. Haider

The most critical factors include maintaining proper humidity and temperature, using high-quality spawn, and ensuring sterile growing conditions to prevent contamination.

Moderator

How can mushroom farming contribute to Iraq's food security?

Mr. Haider

Mushrooms are a nutritious and protein-rich food source that can complement traditional diets. Expanding local production can help reduce dependence on imports and offer affordable, healthy food options.

Moderator

How can awareness of mushroom consumption be increased in Iraq?

Mr. Haider

Public awareness campaigns, collaborations with restaurants, and the introduction of mushroom-based products into traditional cuisine can encourage wider adoption.

Moderator

What is the future of mushroom farming in Iraq?

Mr. Haider

The future is promising, with growing consumer interest and increasing investment in local production. By adopting modern techniques and expanding market outreach, Iraq can establish a thriving mushroom farming industry.



9. Fertilizers and Agriculture: Environmental Challenges and the Future of Investment

The final discussion panel featured **Eng. Marwa Al-Nuaimi**, an expert in manufacturing automation and environmental sustainability. As **Sustainability Ambassador at the Baghdad Renewable Energy Center**, she has led initiatives promoting eco-friendly agricultural practices. In 2019, she founded **Green Gold**, a project focused on sustainable farming, organic products, and waste recycling. Al-Nuaimi addressed the environmental challenges and investment opportunities in Iraq's agribusiness sector. Unlike previous discussions, this session also incorporated audience contributions, as their perspectives uncovered critical agribusiness challenges that had not been addressed before. These insights were crucial in highlighting the role of the governorate in supporting agribusiness development across Iraq.



Moderator

If all farms in Iraq started using Green Gold products tomorrow, what would be the most noticeable change?

Mrs. Marwa

Consumers would experience a significant improvement in food quality and health. There would be a shift toward sustainable farming practices that nurture the ecosystem rather than deplete it. More farmers would adopt eco-friendly methods, leading to increased investment in Iraq's green economy, more agricultural projects, and a stronger export market.

Moderator

Is sustainable agriculture just a passing trend in Iraq, or is it the future? And what do "green skills" mean?

Mrs. Marwa

It is not a passing trend—it is a necessity. Climate change is real, and farmers are already feeling its effects. Salinization is rendering large areas of land unfit for cultivation, and rapid population growth threatens food security. Green skills refer to the knowledge and techniques needed to implement sustainable agricultural practices that preserve the environment.

Moderator

What is the biggest challenge facing Iraq's agricultural businesses, and how can it be addressed?

Mrs. Marwa

Desertification is the primary challenge, followed by the financial struggles of farmers. Previously, government support provided equipment, land, and essential resources, but economic conditions have forced farmers to raise prices just to survive. Additionally, many farmers lack awareness of sustainable business strategies. For instance, some manufacturers prefer to import tomatoes rather than buy locally due to concerns over quality. High taxation and competition from cheaper imports also create difficulties for local producers.

Moderator

If you had the power to shape Iraq's agricultural policies, what would be your top priorities?

Mrs. Marwa

I would establish agricultural cooperatives to allow farmers to share land, equipment, and costs. Many agricultural laws exist but are inactive—these must be enforced to ensure that loans go directly into farming, not personal expenses. Water consumption policies must also be introduced to combat desertification. Additionally, restaurants should be required to source a percentage of their ingredients from local farms. Iraq has access to Green Fund resources, yet they remain underutilized. These funds should be directed toward rainwater harvesting, awareness campaigns, and sustainable farming projects.

Moderator

The chemical fertilizer market in Iraq is controlled by a few major companies. How do you compete with such monopolies?

Mrs. Marwa

The monopoly exists due to a lack of awareness and limited alternatives. Farmers need to be educated about the environmental and economic benefits of organic fertilizers. If consumers demand organic produce, farmers will adopt sustainable practices, gradually breaking the reliance on chemical fertilizers.

Moderator

Do Iraqi consumers have enough awareness about environmental conservation and organic products?

Mrs. Marwa

Not yet. Awareness must start at home—families need to prioritize healthier food choices for their children. Schools, media, and businesses all play a role in promoting environmental responsibility and organic farming benefits.

Moderator

Can Green Gold fertilizers change the taste and quality of fruits and vegetables in Iraq? How would consumers notice the difference?

Mrs. Marwa

Absolutely. Sustainable farming improves soil health, which directly affects the flavor, texture, and nutritional value of crops. However, the process requires proper seed selection, soil management, and minimal pesticide use. Over time, consumers will notice fresher, better-tasting produce.

Moderator

How do you convince farmers to adopt this approach?

Mrs. Marwa

We focus on agricultural businesses already inclined toward organic farming rather than trying to persuade traditional farmers. Many international companies, including KFC, prefer to source organic ingredients, making sustainability a competitive advantage for farmers.

Moderator

Which sustainable crops would you recommend for investors in Iraq?

Mrs. Marwa

Turmeric is easy to cultivate, aloe vera requires minimal water and is in high demand for skincare and medical products, and pistachios and sesame offer strong market potential. These crops are well-suited for Iraq's climate and growing green economy.

Moderator

What advice do you have for young entrepreneurs looking to start sustainable businesses?

Mrs. Marwa

Identify a real problem that needs solving, conduct thorough research, and develop a prototype before scaling up. Iraq presents great opportunities for green businesses, but success requires planning, market testing, and a clear vision.



Audience Contributions and Key Discussions

Moderator

What role should the government play in supporting agriculture in Iraq?

Audience Member

The government has shifted toward a more capitalistic approach, making direct subsidies unlikely. However, policies that encourage exports and investment in farming projects could still provide meaningful support.

Moderator

Do Iraqi farmers recognize the full potential of their crops in international markets?

Audience Member

Not always. Many farmers undervalue their produce. For instance, Iraqi onions are highly sought after in Gulf markets, yet they lack the proper marketing channels to capitalize on this demand.

Moderator

Beyond financial aid, what kind of support do farmers need?

Audience Member

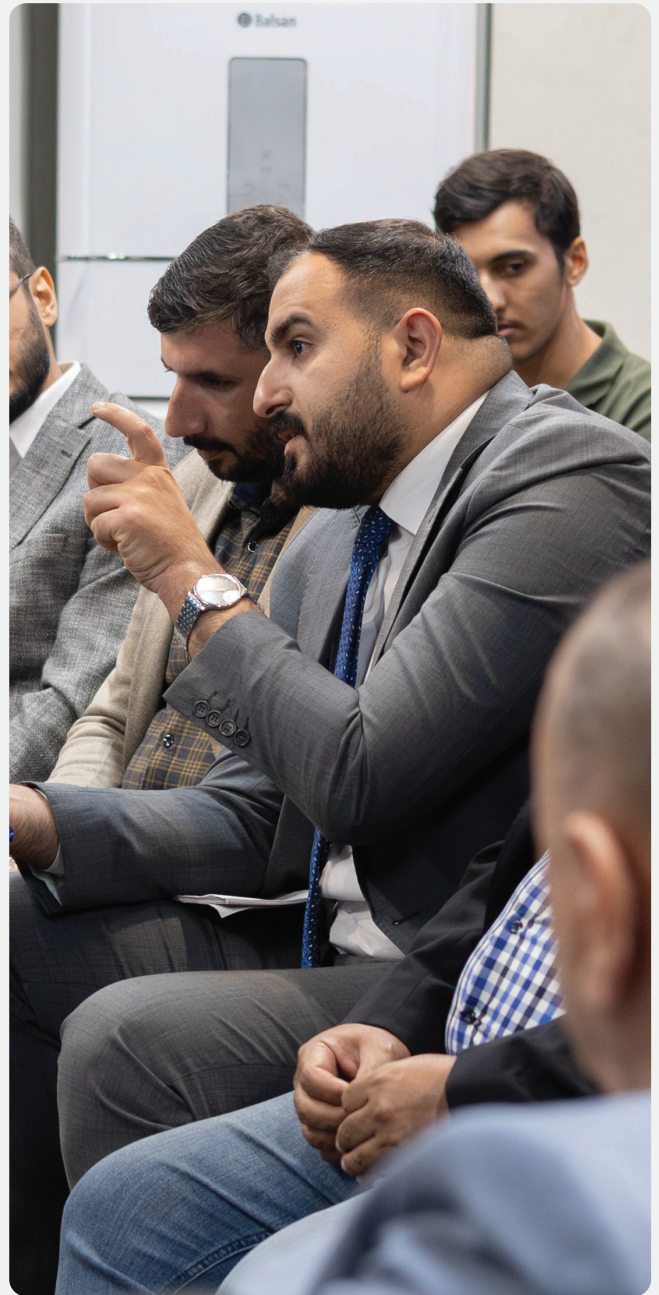
Farmers require more than just financial assistance. They need investment in critical infrastructure such as electricity and water supply to sustain viable agricultural businesses.

Moderator

How do infrastructure issues affect agricultural investments?

Audience Member

Even a significant financial investment can fail without basic infrastructure. While agricultural land is relatively inexpensive, bureaucratic hurdles and tribal disputes complicate ownership and investment.



Moderator

What is the biggest challenge preventing agribusinesses from scaling up?

Audience Member

Electricity remains the biggest challenge. Without a reliable power supply, agribusinesses struggle to expand. Additionally, over-reliance on well water damages soil fertility in the long run.

This discussion underscored the urgent need for government action, private sector investment, and consumer awareness to drive Iraq's transition toward sustainable agriculture.

Challenges and Opportunities in Iraq's Agribusiness and Food Sector

Iraq's agribusiness and food sector presents both challenges and opportunities, with key areas such as technology integration, product innovation, quality management, supply chain optimization, and sustainable farming practices shaping its future. The Wifra Program discussions underscored the importance of collaboration between entrepreneurs, policymakers, and industry leaders to drive progress. While issues like weak infrastructure, regulatory hurdles, and market instability remain, growing demand for high-quality local products, advancements in digital solutions, and increasing government support create a strong foundation for sustainable growth.

Below is a summary of the key challenges and opportunities identified across various aspects of Iraq's agribusiness sector:

Aspect	Challenges	Opportunities
Technology Integration	Slow adoption due to limited awareness, weak infrastructure, and business resistance.	Smart farming solutions (AI-powered irrigation, automation, blockchain in supply chains) can increase efficiency and yield.
	Lack of digital payment solutions and modern supply chain technologies.	Government-led digital transformation initiatives can drive adoption.
	Insufficient government incentives for AgriTech adoption.	Expanding digital financial services can enhance access to credit and reduce transaction inefficiencies.
Innovation in Food Products	Limited access to high-quality local ingredients forces manufacturers to rely on imports.	Rising demand for organic, premium, and locally produced food presents an opportunity for investment in new product development.
	Weak R&D investment in food processing and product innovation.	Encouraging partnerships between research institutions and agribusinesses can boost product innovation.
	Lack of consumer awareness about premium and organic products.	Government incentives for local production can reduce import dependency.
Quality Management & Food Safety	Weak enforcement of food safety regulations leads to poor-quality imports and food fraud.	Stronger regulatory frameworks and harmonized food safety standards can enhance market trust.
	The high cost of international certifications prevents small businesses from competing globally.	Subsidized certification programs can help small agribusinesses meet global food safety standards.
	Limited consumer trust due to inconsistent product quality.	Blockchain for food traceability can increase transparency and credibility.

Aspect	Challenges	Opportunities
Supply Chain Management	Outdated distribution networks, price instability, and reliance on imports create market inefficiencies.	Digital inventory & real-time tracking systems can improve distribution efficiency.
	High logistics costs due to poor infrastructure and fragmented supply chains.	Investment in cold chain logistics & better storage solutions can reduce food waste.
	Post-harvest losses due to lack of proper storage and transport.	Export promotion & better trade policies can strengthen Iraq's competitiveness in global markets.
Farming & Agricultural Productivity	Water scarcity & outdated farming techniques lower productivity.	Climate-smart agriculture & modern irrigation techniques (e.g., drip irrigation, water desalination projects) can improve efficiency.
	High production costs due to dependence on expensive fertilizers & imported seeds.	Government support for agricultural cooperatives can help reduce reliance on monopolies.
	Bureaucratic challenges & monopolies limit farmers' access to better inputs.	Investment in local seed & fertilizer production can lower costs and improve self-sufficiency.
Environmental Sustainability & Climate Resilience	Desertification, soil salinity, and chemical fertilizer dependency threaten long-term productivity.	Scaling up eco-friendly fertilizers & organic farming initiatives can promote sustainable agricultural practices.
	Limited green investment & lack of sustainable farming initiatives.	Investment in renewable energy solutions (e.g., solar-powered irrigation) can help reduce water usage & operational costs.
	Weak enforcement of environmental policies.	Introducing carbon credit incentives & sustainability grants can encourage green investments.



The Road Ahead: A Call to Action

Iraq's agribusiness sector is at a turning point, and immediate action is required to transform challenges into opportunities. To unlock new economic growth and long-term sustainability, key players must take concrete steps in the following areas:

- **Accelerate Digital Transformation:** Invest in AgriTech solutions, expand digital financial services, and introduce smart logistics systems to increase efficiency and transparency in the supply chain.
- **Drive Product Innovation:** Support local food production and research partnerships to develop high-quality, export-ready products, reducing dependency on imported goods.
- **Enhance Quality and Safety Standards:** Strengthen food safety regulations, provide affordable certification programs, and implement traceability systems to boost consumer and market trust.
- **Modernize Supply Chains:** Improve cold storage, transportation networks, and inventory management systems to reduce post-harvest losses and enhance market stability.
- **Support Sustainable Farming:** Promote climate-smart agriculture, incentivize

Water-efficient irrigation, and increase investment in organic and eco-friendly farming techniques to ensure long-term productivity.

- **Foster Collaboration:** Entrepreneurs, policymakers, investors, and industry stakeholders must work together to create a thriving agribusiness ecosystem, supported by favorable policies, investment incentives, and capacity-building initiatives.

Moving Forward with Impact

Wifra is committed to playing an active role in empowering agribusiness leaders, supporting innovation, and bridging the gap between challenges and solutions. Through strategic partnerships, expert-led discussions, and investment facilitation, Iraq's food sector can pave the way for resilience, economic growth, and global competitiveness.

The time to act is now. With the right steps, Iraq's agribusiness sector can transform into a thriving industry that feeds communities, drives investment, and positions itself as a leader in sustainable food production.



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