

Seeds of Resilience: How Agriculture is Restoring Livelihoods for Syrian Farmers



In Syria, over a decade of conflict and climate shocks have disrupted everyday life and plunged the economy into a deep crisis, devastating the agriculture sector, a vital lifeline for millions. Years of infrastructure destruction, mass displacement, the collapse of public services and skyrocketing market prices have stripped farmers of their livelihoods, leaving them with limited income, mounting debt, and daily survival challenges. Compounded by the rising temperatures, prolonged droughts, and erratic rainfall which have further eroded agricultural productivity, turning once self-sufficient farmers into those grappling with food insecurity and shrinking opportunities. In such a fragile context, where farming remains more than a source of income, supporting farmers to recover is not just about survival, it is a pathway to dignity and long-term recovery.

The Syria Resilience Initiative (SRI), led by CARE, Mercy Corps, and IRC in partnership with a number of national organizations, works with farmers across Syria to find innovative ways to overcome the challenges. As part of the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's Building Local Resilience in Syria programme (BLRS), SRI has taken an integrated approach to help vulnerable farming households regain their livelihoods, learn new skills, and rebuild for a more resilient future.

Meet Jamila, Shahada and Ghanem, who are from different parts of Syria and whose lives took a turn when they joined the SRI's programme. Their stories prove that when resilience is met with the right support, life could take a positive and promising turn.

Jamila's* story: Cultivating Hope After Loss

In Aleppo, northwest Syria, 50-year-old Jamila* is the sole breadwinner for her family. After the tragic loss of her husband, Jamile turned to farming the family's land to provide for her four sons and three daughters. Jamila was determined to secure a dignified life for her children, although farming in today's Syria has immense challenges. The high market prices of agricultural inputs like seeds, fertilizer, pesticides and the diesel to operate the irrigation system, that she could no

longer farm her land effectively. The drought worsened the situation, as erratic rainfall made irrigation nearly impossible. Despite labouring hard with her children, Jamile could only cultivate a small portion of her land, and the produce prices in local markets often didn't even cover the cost of production.

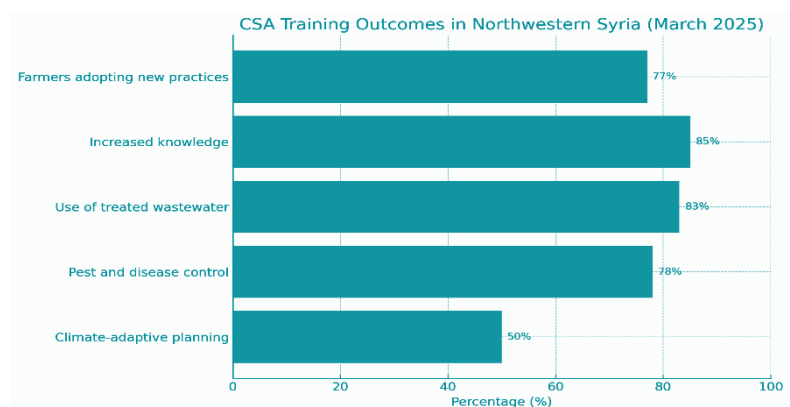
She said, "Everything has become expensive: diesel, seeds, and pesticides. Meanwhile, the prices of the vegetables we grow are decreasing. Water has become scarce. With the insufficient rainfall, I can only cultivate a small part of the land. We work hard, but the returns are not enough."



Jamila joined the BLRS programme activities focusing on wastewater treatment for agricultural use and rehabilitation of irrigation canals.

As part of the project, Jamila received a 300 GBP cash grant to buy seeds, fuel, and farming tools. She also received technical guidance on pest control and crop selection, including advice to plant vegetables requiring cooking to ensure safer, more nutritious meals.

According to the **NWS Post Harvesting Monitoring Report** produced in March 2025 by Care, climate-smart agriculture training in northwestern Syria resulted in widespread behavioural change and a notable rise in average household income (from \$35 to \$77 per month).



Jamila's eyes lit up as she said, *"This allowed me to expand the cultivated area in my land, follow better farming practices and I successfully sold my vegetables in the market for a good profit"*.

With time, Jamila's family's situation began to stabilize, and she regained the confidence to plan for the future.

"I hope that support for farmers increases so that a larger segment of the population benefits from the project. It is important not only for the farmers but also for the entire community", she added.

**Name is changed for privacy.*

Sahada's story: Collective Farming Builds Collective Resilience

Farming in Northeast Syria has not been easier than in other regions. Faced by the same challenges, smallholder farmers in Al-Hasakah, northeast Syria, live a daily struggle to make ends meet. Shahada was one of them who, in addition to being restrained by the overall challenging economic situation and the climate change impact, she has been struggling to access tools, resources, and technical support needed to maintain productivity in her land, especially as a woman. Despite these limitations, Shahada remained committed to farming and to improving the lives of others in her community.

Through SRI, Shawan was able to benefit from an integrated and comprehensive approach that addressed multiple challenges including:

Access to Ploughing Services:

Shawan received a tractor to serve a 20-member cooperative, which reduced their reliance on costly rental services, saving each farmer approximately 220 GBP per planting season. This ensured timely land preparation, directly improving crop yields. Additionally, the cooperative began offering ploughing services to neighboring villages, generating an estimated 5,000 GBP in seasonal income. After developing her experience in machinery, Shahada became the group's tractor operator, which strengthened her role as a woman in the community as well as her income.



Solar-Powered Irrigation Systems:

To address the issue of high fuel cost and unreliable diesel supply for irrigation, each cooperative member received a solar-powered energy system to operate their water well pumps, cutting irrigation costs from 1,500 GBP per season to nearly zero. The elimination of unreliable diesel supply and the savings generated allowed farmers to expand their cultivated areas and reinvest in infrastructure. Reliable irrigation also contributed to more consistent crop growth, even during harsh conditions.

Smart Irrigation Sprinklers:

The installation of smart sprinkler systems improved water use efficiency by up to 70%, ensured

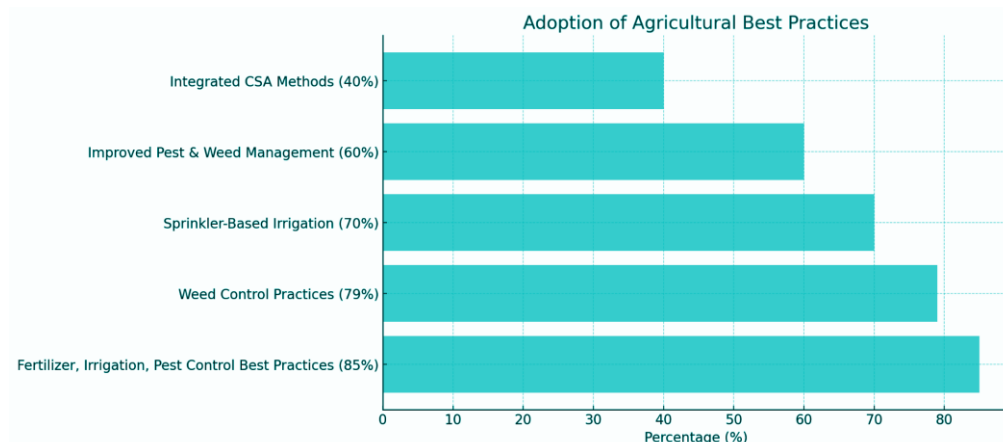
more even soil moisture, and reduced labour demands. The system also enabled the cooperative to irrigate larger areas and reduced land leveling costs by 10%, helping to protect wheat production during a period of regional water scarcity.



Training in Modern Farming and Cooperative Management:

The cooperative received training in agriculture, cooperative management, and resource planning. This support empowered farmers to adopt more sustainable farming practices, work more effectively as a group, and improve coordination and resource sharing. Shahada specifically gained more confidence in managing the equipment and collaborating with male peers, strengthening her leadership and decision-making role within the group, breaking traditional gender roles in agriculture.

According to the **NES: BLRS-Year2-Post Harvest Report produced in January 2025 by Mercy Corps**, adoption of improved techniques was strong, with the below results demonstrating a comprehensive shift toward sustainable farming.



Sahada said, ***“The training and equipment helped us farm more effectively and depend less on outside help. I am proud to be part of this group and show that women can lead in farming too.”***

A lookout to the future: Shahada and the cooperative members plan to reinvest income from tractor services into maintenance and expansion of cultivated land. Shahada is now encouraging more women in the village to participate in farming and take on leadership roles within new or existing cooperatives.

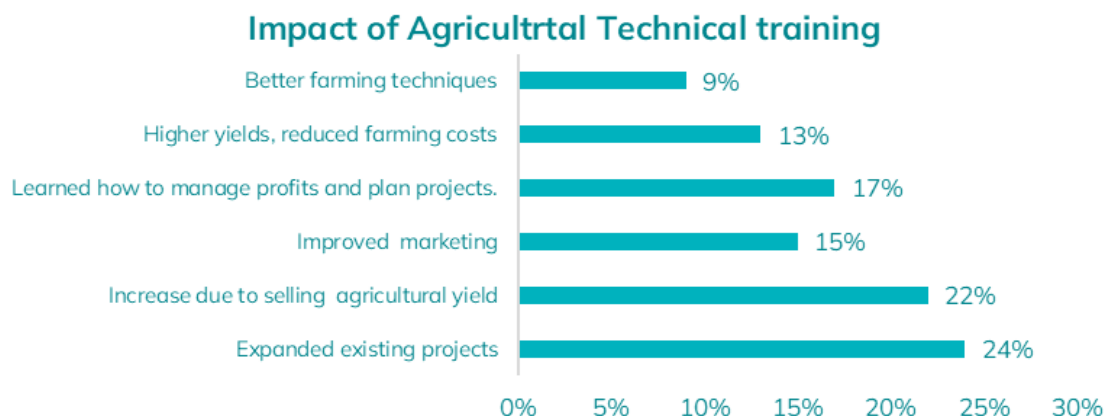
[Ghanem’s Story: “We Keep Farming, No Matter What”: Ghanem’s Story of Resilience in Rural Syria](#)

In rural Damascus, 40-year-old Ghanem is the father and sole provider for his six children and his wife and mother, who both suffer from disability. Ghanem has been farming his entire life. For him, "Farming is more than just a way to earn a living—it's a way of life."

Despite his dedication, Ghanem's income stayed limited, which prevented him from renting larger plots of farmland or purchasing essential agricultural inputs. This restricted his productivity and left him in constant worry about his ability to feed his family and afford his children's education, among other caregiving responsibilities. He was left desperate.

This is when he learned about SRI and its support to a grain cooperative in his area. Through this project, he was introduced to a network of local farmers, many of whom shared similar struggles. He received training in communication and financial management, along with a cash grant. Ghanem felt part of a community, connected and supported.

An endline study conducted by CARE in early 2025 in South Central Syria showed that agricultural participants experienced increased incomes. The proportion earning more than 450,000 SYP rose from 34% to 48%, while those earning less than 450,000 SYP dropped from 66% to 52%. Post-activity monitoring further confirmed the effectiveness of the approach, with 95% of participants reporting that the training contributed to improving their income.



"I've learned to manage, to adapt, and to keep going," Ghanem shared. "The programme didn't just give me tools—it reminded me that I'm not alone."

The impact was immediate. Ghanem began making smarter decisions about how to manage his land and resources. He became more confident in managing his finances, adapting to changes and working collaboratively with others. Even when many cooperative members withdrew due to escalating security risks, taking shared equipment and reducing marketing channels, Ghanem persevered. Alongside a fellow farmer, he continued cultivating his land and began producing

animal feed from their grain stock using a local mill, meeting market demands despite limited resources.

Today, Ghanem is still farming. While challenges persist, he is optimistic about the future and continues to explore ways to sustain and grow his farming. As he said, “*I still have hope. I have ideas in mind, but everything in its time. What matters is that we keep farming and continue moving forward.*”

Ghanem’s story is a reminder that with the right support, even the most vulnerable can adapt, persevere, and lead. His resilience is not just about surviving hardship; it’s about planting the seeds for a more stable and dignified future.