



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HARAAZ PROJECT

The Haraaz Project began in the latter half of 2006, after Shabbir A. Ezzi and his wife, Ummehani, visited the home of his ancestors located in the Haraz Mountains, a region in the northwest highlands of Yemen. Emotionally moved, with a sense of connection to the beauty and potential development of this area, Shabbir, along with his family owned company, Al-Ezzi Industries, established the Haraaz Project.

With the vision of restoring its agricultural potential, the mission of Al-Ezzi Industries is to implement a range of best business practices, both commercial and community based. Through this two-prong process, the goal is to assist farmers in becoming self-sufficient, providing solutions for maintaining long-term sustainability for the region.

Historically, Yemen served as the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, the hub for ancient spice routes. Romans knew this fertile and wealthy country as “The Arabia Felix,” or Happy Arabia. For centuries, the rocky Haraz Mountains, rich with fertile soil and climate, produced coffee and other agriculture.

Over the last century, this region, along with the rest of Yemen has declined in value due to economic, political and geographical setting. In fact, Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East.

Apart from political, economic, and social factors, one of the major causes of deterioration in Yemen is the cultivation of Qat (pronounced “ kaat”) farming and chewing. Qat, which grows alongside coffee on the same stone terraces, is easily cultivated and provides quick money. Qat also competes with coffee for scarce water, depletes the soil of nutrients and causes an unproductive afternoon. From 12:00 noon until 4:00PM, each day workers stop all activities and chew Qat, which has become a habit-forming ritual, adding many unproductive hours.

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Disillusioned farmers have no incentive for producing coffee, realizing the effort is far greater than the return. The rapid migration of locals to the congested cities further added to the deterioration of cultivable land. As an experiment, Al-Ezzi developed the incentive program for farmers to grow more coffee, guaranteeing premium prices, implementing solutions for quality and providing a refreshing transparency in the supply chain. Organizing coffee tours around the cultivated terraces for the interested international buyers has immensely helped to bring better value back to the farmers. The creation of unique farmer IDs has induced a sense of pride amongst the isolated communities, reviving their interest in their valuable agricultural land. This focused and committed effort is already resulting in an unprecedented transition from qat farming back to coffee farming in the Haraz Mountains.

Long term, the Haraaz brand includes a range of agricultural products including honey, fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts and livestock grown in the Haraz region.

On a broader scale, Haraaz aims to provide an innovative platform of global trade and communication for the region's agricultural community, opening up channels of education and awareness that can facilitate a transition toward improved living standards for the local community.

The Haraz Mountains are an embodiment of all things healthy, with the vast, unspoiled expanse of high mountains, rich volcanic soil, pure, unpolluted air and nature dependent organic farming practices, appropriately reflected in the brand tag-line: *Steps to Health*.

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