



State Comptroller and Ombudsman
Annual Report 70B | 2020

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural
Development

Training and Professional Service Unit in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development

Abstract



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Background

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is appointed by the government to oversee the fields of agriculture and rural areas in Israel. The Ministry of Agriculture's Training and Profession Service Unit (Shaham) is responsible for producing objective knowledge in the field of agriculture and for providing it to farmers in various fields. Shaham's operations are aimed at improving the quality of agricultural produce and the profitability of the agricultural sector in Israel through an efficient use of the means of production available to agriculture - land, water, labor and capital - with a view to the public benefit inherent in agriculture.

Key figures

85%

of the territory of the State of Israel is rural, with approximately 830,000 residents living in 1,013 communities

NIS **30.5** billion

The value of agricultural produce in Israel in 2018 (about USD 8.5 billion)

204 kg

Average per capita supply of fresh fruits and vegetables to the domestic market from domestic production in 2018

140

The number of employment positions within Shaham as of August 2019. 114 of the jobs are related to farmers training

NIS **9.3** million

Shaham's expenditure budget in 2019

31

Courses conducted by Shaham in 2018 with a total of 1,208 participants

Audit Actions



In March-August 2019, the State Comptroller's Office examined various aspects of Shaham's activities, including Shaham's services in the light of farmers' needs; methodology, supervision and control of the work of the instructors; relations between Shaham and the Ministry of Agriculture's districts; counseling and training services from external consultants; the organizational structure and operating concept; and management of the research and development center under Shaham's responsibility. The examination was conducted at the Ministry of Agriculture, and supplementary examinations were carried out at the Civil Service Commission, and at the Ministry of Finance - the Budget Department, the Accountant General Division and the Government Housing Administration.

The Situation Reflected in the Audit Findings



Shaham did not map the needs and gaps among farmers with regard to its activities in the field of applied agriculture and other fields, and did not initiate a process to receive and evaluate feedback from farmers as to the level of their satisfaction with its operations.



Shaham does not have procedures in place that specify the principles and methods for its operation, even though Shaham operates more than one hundred instructors in the various agricultural industries engaged in the production and distribution of knowledge.



Much knowledge gained from experience of instructors throughout their years of work in Shaham was not fully documented in an orderly manner and was therefore not available for the use of other instructors and farmers.



Lack of supervision, control and documentation of the instructors' work and the response and service they provide to the farmers: No documentation regarding the identities of the farmers who were the recipients of services; counseling and training methods were not examined; and no record was kept of the length of time from the date of the farmer's application to Shaham until a response was provided to them.



In the interaction between Shaham and the Ministry of Agriculture districts - Difficulties have arisen in the work interfaces between Shaham's management and the district managers on issues related to the districts' operations and these may have had influence on Shaham's training programs.



Research areas in the Research and Development Center (R&D) owned by Shaham - Of the studies conducted in 2018, only about half were within the specific mission assigned to Shaham R&D - the effect of using effluent water of various grades on agricultural produce - while the other half were mainly concerned with the examination of new agricultural varieties and the improvement of existing ones.



The training structure and greenhouses in the R&D have long been neglected, and they have not been returned to the State Housing Administration to consider alternative use by the state; in addition, **Shaham provided space for the use of an external party** without a valid agreement for the entire period of use, and without collecting the entire proceeds due to the state.



Actions for correcting deficiencies - After the audit was completed, the Ministry of Agriculture issued a tender for the acquisition of organizational consultancy services for Shaham, and the requested consultancy products were related to the findings that emerge from the audit; Shaham is exploring ways to properly manage the instructors while increasing the capability of control over them.

In order to preserve the knowledge gained during the instructors' work, Shaham initiated a project, in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture training unit, to map the fields of knowledge and plan its conservation.

The Ministry of Agriculture's initiative to integrate elders of the Ethiopian population into agricultural community activity in the realm of R&D, is most welcome and should continue, develop and, if necessary, also be accompanied by consultancy and training of Shaham's instructors, provided that the activity is done in accordance with the relevant legal provisions.

Main Audit Recommendations



Shaham must **map the needs and gaps** in its field of operation to directly identify the lack of knowledge or capabilities of farmers and to assess relevant trends. Shaham must also examine farmers' satisfaction with its operations and learn if they do indeed help improve their professional level and profitability, and how to improve them, and improve supervision of instructor activities.



The Ministry of Agriculture must **establish cooperation between Shaham and the districts** to operate the training and counseling services optimally and efficiently and from an overall perspective reflecting the needs of farmers.



The managements of the Ministry of Agriculture and Shaham are required to **implement a structured process for documenting information** and sharing it effectively, including through a digital computing platform. In view of the benefits of digital learning and the benefit of making counseling and training accessible to farmers, Shaham must examine ways to implement this method in its services.

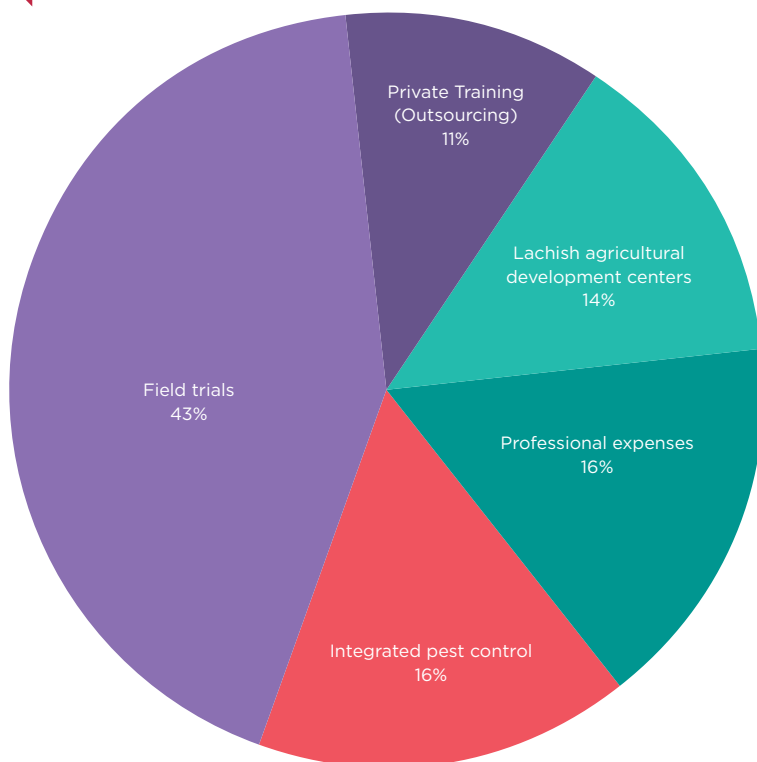


The Ministry of Agriculture and Shaham's management must examine **the mix of experiments conducted at Shaham's R&D and the need for a person to function in a management capacity and focus on the ongoing management of R&D**.

Summary

Over the past decade, there have been changes in all agricultural sectors in Israel aimed at improving their profitability. In addition, there is an increase in the prices of inputs and requirements for the quality of produce and the maintenance of a fair price, which increase the financial risk in the agriculture industry and undermine the viability of this occupation. In light of the findings presented in this report, Shaham - as a central body that is responsible for the production and distribution of applied professional knowledge to farmers in a timely, accessible and independent manner - is required to adapt its activities to its purpose in order to assist in developing farmers' professional capabilities and maximize the benefits that can result from its activity.

Shaham's expenditure budget distribution in 2019 (percentage)



According to the Ministry of Agriculture's data, processed by the State Comptroller's Office.