

Foreword

I recently published a report on "Government Management of the Civilian Sector during the Swords of Iron War," which reflected fundamental gaps in the government's preparedness for handling emergencies and their impact on the civilian sector in Israel, as well as significant shortcomings in the ability to provide an effective and comprehensive response to civilian needs. Alongside the publication of that systemic report, I continue to release reports that summarize in-depth audits addressing particular civilian aspects; today, the report on "The Agricultural Sector during the Swords of Iron War" is being published.

In the two regions of the country most severely affected by the Swords of Iron War – the Gaza Envelope and the northern region, which together account for a significant portion of Israel's agricultural production – thousands of farmers and farms supply Israel's citizens with fresh and essential food products: eggs, meat, milk, fruits, and vegetables. The activity of these farms is a critical component in maintaining continuity of life for the public in Israel and ensuring a steady food supply, as well as in sustaining an agricultural community presence along Israel's borders.

This report highlights major deficiencies in the government's emergency preparedness in the field of agriculture and in the implementation of the response after the outbreak of the war. These deficiencies include: failure to prepare updated emergency plans and responses, and even to drill the response to emergencies during routine periods; the absence on the part of the Ministry of Agriculture of an organizational infrastructure for providing a comprehensive response to an emergency, or of an appropriate IT infrastructure containing information on farms in Israel and their characteristics and on the scope of farm fortification

in the northern region and the Gaza Envelope. Gaps were also found in the handling of the irregular shortage of manpower in the agricultural sector during the war, vis-à-vis recruiting and retaining Israeli and foreign workers and coordinating the handling of the many volunteers who joined forces to assist the sector amidst the war and played a significant role in ensuring a steady supply of produce to the public during the first months of the war.

This report demonstrates the extent to which prior preparedness and drilling, along with the formulation of procedures and action plans for handling emergencies, are essential to improving the government's ability to provide a response within short timeframes and on a large scale.

Since the outbreak of the war, Israel's farmers and their workers have been on the front lines – holding on to the land at the direct and immediate risk of their lives and resuming the operation of their farms under fire, with the support of volunteers. Swift rectification of the fundamental gaps identified in this report is necessary to enable them to continue fulfilling their vital national mission and to ensure that the agricultural sector can continue supplying essential produce to meet Israel's needs – on the front lines and the home front – in both routine times and emergencies.

The preparation of the report necessitated significant effort from the employees of the Division for Audit of Government Ministries and Institutions and those of the Headquarters Division within the Office of the State Comptroller, all of whom worked hard to prepare it with the utmost professionalism, thoroughness, fairness and meticulousness, fulfilling their public responsibilities with a profound sense of true dedication. They have my gratitude.

We continue to pray and express our hopes for the triumph of the IDF and the security agencies, for the return of all hostages, and for the recovery of all those wounded, and for calm and peaceful days ahead.



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**State Comptroller
and Ombudsman**