

## Rizka

Brother and sister Rawad and Nour Malaeb believe that a bright future for Lebanon, a country that imports most of its food, depends on sustainable agriculture. The young siblings from the Aley district want to help build that future by starting a land reclamation and management business that will add to the acreage cultivated according to organic agricultural practices.

They had identified sources of land — individuals too busy to cultivate their own land and Lebanese in diaspora who had abandoned their land — and were acquiring the skills they would need. Rawad was completing his graduate studies in mechanical engineering while Nour worked in food inspection. Both were taking courses to expand their knowledge of agriculture. But they realized their next step had to be intensive training in entrepreneurship.



The brother-and-sister team was selected for AMIDEAST's Skills for Success®: Employability and Entrepreneurship program, offered in partnership with Citi Foundation to 72 unemployed recent university and technical education graduates from all over Lebanon. After completing the initial training in English language, information technology, and basic business skills, they opted for the entrepreneurship track, further benefiting from the AMIDEAST Entrepreneur Institute's Start Your Own Business program in addition to guidance and coaching to start their own business.

Rawad and Nour credit the program with making them better decision makers, capable of finally taking the steps required to start their company, Rizka. "Skills for Success was an amazing experience," they shared. "It gave us the opportunity to move forward in our lives, start our business, and believe that we are capable of achieving more."

After finishing the "Skills for Success" program at AMIDEAST, Rizka went from the ideation phase to the implementation stage. They secured 5 customers and hired 6 workers since the beginning of 2020. However, the pandemic and Lebanese economic crisis hit the market, they couldn't continue the work in its existing form due to the high operational cost of equipment, plants, organic fertilizers, and pesticides.

Despite these obstacles, the siblings were adamant not to quit their entrepreneurial journey. They decided to pivot to an online platform that links landowners with investors

abroad, where the investment cost would be relatively low compared to the Lebanese lira. They took part in the YLP incubation program which offered classes in business development and financials and they worked on developing the newly pivoted startup.

Rawad and Nour have been entering several start-up competitions and won 2<sup>nd</sup> place at Darwazah with AUB, and 3<sup>rd</sup> place with the Park Innovation Hackathon. They are currently applying to the Agrytech accelerator program to continue their next startup phase. Rizka is currently developing its online platform and working on the algorithms needed to do automated analysis for lands to find the optimal investment. The team is expecting to have its first test application ready by February 2021. The Malaeb siblings are excited to continue their entrepreneurial endeavors!