

## Women's Economic Empowerment in Rural Lebanon: Jamileh's Story

Jamileh lives in the rural village of Ksaibeth in South Lebanon with her husband and four children. Until joining the YMCA program Atayeb al Rif (Rural Delights), Jamileh had never worked outside her home.

After finishing YMCA training in food processing and preservation in the traditional 'mouneh' style, as well as receiving training in business skills, Jamileh and 14 other graduates formed a licensed produce cooperative and started producing food items to be sold in local and regional markets.

For the first time in her life, Jamileh is not only earning her own money (\$145 a month), but making decisions on how to invest her earnings.

Empowered, she dreams of new challenges for the future of her family, her community and her country. She is now actively lobbying her local government for new resources to help replicate and increase the program.

The Atayeb al Rif program receives support from YMCA of the USA's International Group through a USAID grant (U.S. Agency for International Development) complemented by contributions from local communities in Lebanon.

### The YMCA Lebanon Program: Atayeb al Rif

The impact this program has had on rural women is astounding. Many of the women had only previously worked in their houses or fields and were not paid for their efforts.

To date, Atayeb Al Rif has created over 500 jobs in 16 co-ops (all owned completely by the women working in them).

This new income (about \$140 a month per worker) offers better opportunities not only for the women but for their children. In addition, these women have developed greater self-confidence and earned a newfound respect from their families and communities.

An additional positive benefit has been noted among the farmers who supply produce to the co-ops. With a steady demand for their produce, the farmers are able to continue working rather than having to move to the cities in search of an income.

