



WFP E-Cards Support Lebanon's Local Market



Lebanese shop owner Zaher Zaher is front of his WFP contracted shop in El-Bireh Akkar, north Lebanon.

When 50-year-old Lebanese shop owner Zaher Khodr joined WFP's food voucher programme in Akkar, northern Lebanon, about two years ago, he did not know that his business would thrive within a few months.

Akkar, North Lebanon – A luminous neon above Zaher Khodr's medium-sized shop in El-Bireh town in Akkar proudly invites both Lebanese and Syrian shoppers. Zaher's store is one out of over 300 similar shops contracted by WFP across Lebanon to receive e-cards that benefit more than 700,000 Syrian refugees. Zaher says his participation in WFP's initiative has attracted more clients to his shop and led to an expansion in his team of local employees.

“My shop was small, half of what it is today. But since I participated in WFP's project I started expanding slowly, month by month, until it became what it is now,” explains Zaher.

The store or Supermarket Zaher, named after its proud owner, was a good fit for the e-card programme due to its close proximity to an area with one of the highest concentration of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The store also complies with WFP's selection criteria regarding prices, quality, availability of food items, space and cleanliness among others.

“The expansion of my shop made it attractive not only to Syrian refugees but also to Lebanese clients,” he adds. “Sales increased by 70 percent and I hired two young Lebanese men to help me cater to the growing number of customers.”

Since the launch of the programme in July 2012, WFP has injected over US\$200 million into Lebanon's local economy through the e-card system. Refugees can use these e-cards in any of the contracted shops to buy food whenever they need, allowing them to choose the food items they like. This includes fresh produce such as fruits, vegetables, dairy products and eggs, which



are not included in traditional food rations but are available at contracted shops like Supermarket Zaher.

“I buy fresh vegetables and fruits from local producers and Lebanese farmers and I buy meat and chicken from the area’s butchers and small-scale herders. I deal with nearly twenty Lebanese farmers and small business owners regularly to buy my fresh items,” says Zaher as he walks through his shop, showing the variety of products on display. Through WFP’s e-card programme, they benefit too from a new market through which they can sell their goods.”

For the past 25 years, this shop has been Zaher’s sole source of income and has helped him provide for his elderly mother and father. Business has never been as good.

“The electronic card system is efficient. The payments are made without delay in exchange for the food that Syrian refugees buy through the cards and I have the cash I need to keep the shop furnished and ready, helping others but also benefiting myself,” Zaher says.

WFP continues to expand the number of shops it is working with around Lebanon.

“The voucher programme benefits Lebanese shop owners particularly in some of the poorest and most deprived areas of the Bekaa Valley and north Lebanon, where there is a large concentrations of Syrian refugees,” says WFP spokesperson Laure Chadraoui. “By expanding the programme, we ensure that as many people as possible in affected host communities are benefiting. Our monitoring activities show that most shop owners made several forms of investment to improve their businesses since enrolling with the e-card programme.”