



Blazing Saddles

Stables and horse farms in settlements and outposts in the West Bank



June 2018



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Introduction>>

Toward the beginning of July 2017 [we exposed a story on pirate stables](#) that ‘the guys’ from the settlement of Sha’arei Tikva established with Manashe Shati, the Civilian Security Coordinator (a civilian settler employed by the Israeli Ministry of Defense to oversee settlement security detail) from the settlement, in the olive groves of their Palestinian neighbors from the village of Sanniriya. Horse stables were established on this site in 2005, and following a legal battle conducted by the landowners, it was evacuated. Yet in 2015 the stable was rebuilt on territory nearby spanning a larger area, where it stands to this day.

This story is one of many expressions of a culture of lawless transgression, which is likely to be found in most, if not all, Israeli settlements in the West Bank. This culture adapts to the character and needs of the local population it permeates, yet all cases of unauthorized takeover involve the authorities cooperating with settlers - whether actively or through turning a blind eye.

This short report is devoted to one of the most prominent phenomena spanning the West Bank in recent years, namely the construction of stables and horse farms in settlements and outposts. It is part of a series of short reports that Kerem Navot will publish on various means through which settlers take over primarily private land in the West Bank, with the help of the government.

As with previous reports, in this report, too, we focus on the minimalist definition of private Palestinian-owned land, in other words, solely land that the Israeli authorities agree to recognize as privately owned by Palestinians.¹ It should be noted that Palestinians themselves often define ownership of the land differently, and for the most part they do not recognize the validity of the various acts of expropriation that Israel has carried out since 1967.

Illegal construction of stables and horse farms in settlements and outposts is also well known to the civilian body responsible for enforcing planning and construction laws in the West Bank, namely the Civil Administration. Over the years, the Civil Administration's supervision unit has issued no fewer than 44 demolition orders for illegally constructed Israeli structures that are used as stables and horse farms. Needless to mention, as with the vast majority of demolition orders issued by the Civil Administration over the years for thousands of structures in settlements and outposts, in most of these cases nothing was done to implement the orders, evacuate the structures, demolish them, or punish the perpetrators.

The construction of stables and horse farms is common in settlements and outposts, in part because most settlements and outposts have generous 'reserves' of land, following the sweeping policy enforced by the army and settlers to prevent Palestinian landowners from accessing large territories surrounding settlements. Many of these 'reserves' are invaded by settlers, who identify opportunities to make various uses of

¹ We received information on land ownership from the Civil Administration, in response to several requests that we submitted in recent years regarding freedom of information. Therefore the accuracy of the information presented here should be considered officially approved by Israeli authorities.

these lands according to their needs. This phenomenon is flourishing, of course, as the system of law enforcement in the West Bank is nearly entirely dysfunctional. This is true mainly with regard to protecting Palestinians' property rights.

To conclude the introduction, it should be noted that the phenomenon of constructing stables and horse farms in the settlements is part of a broader trend involving significant increase in the popularity of riding for therapeutic purposes, among other things, even west of the Green Line. This increase is supported by health maintenance organizations (HMOs) that subsidize therapeutic riding classes for their patients, especially for children and adolescents who cope with various cognitive and emotional difficulties. It can therefore be maintained that a large portion of these horse farms owe their existence to HMOs' budgets that are channeled their way.



The sign at the entrance to Oranit Farm

The survey>>>

Our survey included all the Israeli settlements and outposts in the West Bank, over the course of which we found dozens of stables and farms where settlers raise horses. Most of the stables and farms were established on sites far from the built-up parts of the settlements, mainly due to the unavoidable scents and environmental hazards associated with rearing horses. With that, the need for territory remote from residential and community areas is itself an incentive for illegal construction and invasion of land on which it is illegal to build. In many cases, the people behind the establishment of these farms knowingly chose sites on which construction is prohibited, on the assumption that they would not be used in the future for construction within the settlement, and thus would not be required to evacuate their farms.

The horse farms and stables that we have located can be divided into two main groups: a professional riding farm that offers lessons, and stables or smaller private farms in which settlers rear horses as a hobby and do not offer professional riding activities.

This report is devoted primarily to reviewing the first group, namely the professional riding farms in which lessons take place, and from which the settlers who operate them also make a living.

In the survey we conducted, we found 29 farms that belong to this group. **Eleven of them are illegally constructed (in whole or in part) on private Palestinian-owned land**, while most of the other farms are **built on land that the Israeli authorities confiscated through a variety of means** (such as through declaring them 'state land' for alleged security purposes). Apart from these farms, we are aware of 37 private stables built by settlers who raise horses as a hobby. **Twenty of these stables were built on privately-owned Palestinian land**. At the end of this report you may find a detailed list of these stables.

Professional horse farms>>

The following table lists the professional horse farms in West Bank settlements, the year each farm was established and the status of the land on which they were built:

Number	Name of settlement or outpost	Name of the farm	Year established	Land owner	Demolition order number ²
1	Oranit	Oranit Farm	2005	Private land	62/05
2	Alon Shvut	Hilltop Experience	Unknown	Jewish-owned prior to 1948	
3	Elazar	Experience Center	2004	Private land under military seizure	
4	Efrat	Efrat Horse Farm - Riding Among the Crops	2012	Declared state land	
5	Itamar	The Village Spot	2009	Private land	
6	Beit El	Beit El Horse Farm	2007	Private land	142/07+143/07+144/07+54/09
7	Beit Hagai	Beit Hagai	2005	Declared	

² For various reasons, which are not always clear to us, the Civil Administration did issue demolition orders for all cases of illegal construction.

		Farm (belongs to the youth village)		state land and private land	
8	Beit Yatir	Resurrection Farm	2007	Private land	
9	Givat Harel	Farm on the Hilltop	2006	Private land	230/04+34/ 07
10	Gitit	Gitit Riding Center	2014	Private land under military seizure	
11	Dolev	Dolev Farms	2002	Declared state land	126/10
12	Halamish	Horse farm (name unknown)	Unknown	Declared state land	
13	Teneh Omarim	Teneh Omarim	2013	Declared state land	
14	Kfar Adumim	Judean Desert Farm	Unknown	State land registry	
15	Kfar Eldad	El Hai Farm	2005	Private land	82/16
16	Mevo Horon	Zahala Farm/ Emek Ayalon Farm	2012	Private land	
17	Mevo'ot Yeriho	Garden of Eden Farm	2010	State land registry	11/09
18	Ma'ale Yisrael	Wild West Farm	2009	Private land	

19	Ma'ale Shomron	The Farm in the Village	2015	Declared state land	
20	Alei Zahav	Gold Farm	2002	Declared state land	
21	Anatot	Desert View Farmm	Unknown	State land registry	
22	Ofra	'Chai Beseret' Farm	2013	Land registered under Israeli names	82/13+81/1 3
23	Kedumim	Kedumim Farm	2008	Declared state land	
24	Kalya	Kalya Stables	1999	Declared state land	
25	Kiryat Arba	Federman Farm	2007	Private land	119/00
26	Rehelim		2007	Declared state land	50/07+51/0 7
27	Sde Bar	Herodion Farm	2003	Private land	88/04
28	Tekoa	Tekoa Riding Center	2014	Declared state land	
29	Tekoa	Ilan Horse Farm	2004	Declared state land	

The growth of the farm sector over the past 15 years>>

The table above indicates that most of the horse farms in the settlements have been established over the past 15 years. It is important to note that all 11 horse farms that were built illegally on private Palestinian-owned land were established after the outbreak of the Second Intifada in late 2000, and not by chance: following the Second Intifada, the Israeli army and settlers began to enforce a sweeping policy of preventing Palestinians from accessing their lands located adjacent to settlements. The settlers took advantage of the new reality in order to take control of large areas surrounding the settlements, to establish horse farms among other things.³ In other words, there is no doubt that the growth of the horse industry in the West Bank is directly related to the process of preventing Palestinians from accessing their lands, and to the theft of these lands by settlers.

In order to understand how this pattern developed, it is necessary to address the funding bodies, without which it is very doubtful whether most of these farms would have been built in the first place, and in whose absence most would certainly not have survived.

³ There are enclaves of privately owned Palestinian land in dozens of settlements, within the vast majority of which landowners are not permitted to enter their own land.

Land theft under the auspices of the health budget>>

There are four HMOs that currently operate in Israel: Clalit, Maccabi, Meuhedet and Leumit. All four of these funds provide their policyholders with the same basket of services specified in the Health Insurance Law, which are updated from time to time. This basic basket of services can be expanded through an assortment of supplementary coverage that respective HMOs offer to their policyholders.

One of the insurance rights that supplemental insurance offers is a basket of services called 'child development'. As part of this basket, each diagnosed child is entitled to receive dozens of subsidized treatments each calendar year, through a variety of treatment methods, including therapeutic riding lessons.



Maccabi Health Services

Eligibility: Complementary treatments for children from the ages of three through 18.

Up to 50 treatments per calendar year, up to two treatments per week.

Which therapeutic treatments are included in eligibility?

- Therapeutic Riding
- Treatments for creative expression
- Animal-assisted therapy
- Sports therapy
- Water therapy (not hydrotherapy)

Cost: A deductible fee of NIS 70 for the treatment.



Clalit Health Services

At Clalit Mushlam, children from the ages of three through 17, are entitled to 30 treatments per calendar year and up to 100 during the membership period. Children in the Platinum Master Program are entitled to an additional 25 independent treatments at participating institutions, for NIS 45 per calendar year.



Leumit Health Care Services¹

Leumit is the leading provider for pediatric treatment

- "Leumit excels" in basic treatments in the field of **child development** (physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychological treatments).
- "Leumit is generous in the **amount of treatments...**and with relatively **low independent participation**" in additional treatments in the field of child development (music therapy, art therapy, therapeutic riding).



Meuhedet Health Fund¹

Therapeutic riding: No change in relation to the customary arrangement, indemnity of 75% and up to 110 NIS per treatment.

Some of the professional horse farms in the settlements are connected to HMOs, which provide residents of the settlements with the same basket of services as their policyholders in the State of Israel. Our examination indicates that HMOs do not address questions related to the legal status of the farms, and in some cases they indirectly encourage land theft and illegal construction.

The following table presents farms built on privately owned Palestinian land, and the HMOs with which they are connected.⁴

Affiliated horse farm, built on private land	HMO
Herodion Farm, Beit El Farm, Farm on the Hilltop	Clalit Health Services
Wild West Farm, Farm on the Hilltop	Maccabi Healthcare Services
Zahala Farm, Herodion Farm, Beit El Farm, Wild West Farm, Farm on the Hilltop, Beit Hagai, Tchia Farm	Meuhedet Health Fund
Zahala Farm, Herodion Farm, Beit El Farm, Wild West Farm, Farm on a Hilltop, Beit Hagai, Tchia Farm	Leumit Healthcare Services

⁴ The information is based on text sourced from the farms' Facebook pages and websites, as well as on correspondences and telephone conversations with farm workers.



An aerial photo of a horse farm in Givat Harel



An aerial photo of a horse farm in the outpost of Sde Bar



An aerial photograph of Tchia Farm in Beit Yatir

Fences and security buffer zones surrounding settlements - ideal horse rearing sites>>

Most of the settlements have fencing systems in which private areas belonging to Palestinian landowners are enclosed and inaccessible to them on a daily basis. Some of these fencing systems were built illegally, while others were officially authorized with the enclosed areas trapped within them considered security buffer zones, namely closed military zones, into which entry is only permitted with prior arrangement.⁵ Incidentally it should be noted that since the establishment of these security buffer zones (most of which were set up around 2005), settlers have invaded most of them under various pretexts through varied means. For over a decade, Palestinian landowners' regular entry into their territory has rarely been permitted, if at all - not even considering that the military is required to protect their lands and permit coordinated entry.⁶

In two settlements, horse farms were built within territories enclosed by the surrounding fencing systems established and maintained by the army.

In the settlement of Sha'arei Tikva, settlers - including the settlement's Civilian Security Coordinator, Menashe Shati - built horse stables in the olive groves that lie between the separation barrier and the settlement's original fence. As previously noted, this story was published in July 2017 on the Israeli Army Radio station and on [our Facebook](#)

⁵ See B'Tselem's report, Access Denied: Israeli measures to deny Palestinians access to land around settlements, September 2008. https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200809_access_denied

⁶ See, 'Settlers Using West Bank Security Zones to Expropriate Palestinian Land,' Chaim Levinson, Haaretz, 5 July 2015. <https://www.haaretz.com/security-zones-used-to-expand-settlements-1.5375266>

[page](#). Despite the army's commitment to 'enforce the law' the stables [were not evacuated](#).⁷

West of Nablus in Shavei Shomron, too, settlers established a pasture of sorts for horses to graze in the security buffer zone. In 2005, surrounding this settlement, 400-dunams of private land were declared a security buffer zone. For several years now, the northern part of the security buffer zone has served as a stable for horses, under the protection of electric fences and cameras installed by the army on site. The place is operated by local resident Albert Nakash.

⁷ After the story was exposed we discovered that some 600 meters west of the site a few more stables were built, also within the olive groves trapped between the settlement's own fence and the separation barrier, and also belonging to residents of the settlement of Sha'arei Tikva.

Private stables>>

As noted, the prevailing reality in West Bank settlements provides 'incubator conditions' for border trespassers and Israeli land robbers who take over Palestinian-owned land. In the previous section we reviewed the phenomenon of building professional horse farms in which there is relatively intensive riding activity, from which people make a living. In this section we will briefly review the parallel phenomenon - private stables that settlers establish for 'personal use'.

Most of these stables are located a considerable distance from the constructed areas of the settlements, in order to distance the residents from the foul smell. As a result, these stables were often established on privately owned territories that remained trapped inside, or adjacent to, settlements' fenced-off territories.

The survey found that 20 of the 36 private stables we located were built on privately owned Palestinian land. All the other stables were established (in most cases illegally without permits) on lands that Israel expropriated, either by declaring them 'state land' or by means of their seizure for alleged 'military purposes.'

As with the professional farms, most of the private stables were built in the years following the outbreak of the Second Intifada (in late 2000), notably during the years in which large territories were enclosed surrounding settlements, barring Palestinian entry, thus allowing settlers to take over these lands. It should be noted that the list that appears here is of the stables with which we are familiar, though it is quite possible that other such stables exist that we have not yet located.

Number	Name of settlement or outpost	Year established	Land ownership
1	Adora	2011	Declared state land
2	Alfei Menashe	2003	Private land
3	Ariel	2008	Private land
4	Beit El	1997 לפני שנת	Private land
5	Beit El	2016	Private land under military serizure
6	Bnei Adam	2008	Declared state land
7	Barkan	1999	Declared state land
8	Givat 850 Itamar	2014	Declared state land
9	Givon	2009	Private land
10	Givon	2011	Private land
11	Gva'ot	2012	Declared state land
12	Givat Haroeh Haivri	2017	State land registry
13	Gilad Farm	2010	Private land
14	Yair Farm	2010	Declared state land
15	Maon Farm	2006	Unknown
16	Talmon	2007	Declared state land
17	Kochav Ya'akov	2015	Declared state land
18	Modi'in Illit (Brechtfeld)	2015	Private land

19	Modi'in Illit	2014	Private land
20	Maoz Zvi	2008	State land registry
21	Nili	2006	Declared state land
22	Susiya	2012	Private land
23	Sne Ya'akov	2014	Private land
24	Adei Ad	2010	Private land
25	Emanuel	2015	Declared state land
26	Asael	2005	Declared state land
27	Etniel	2003	Private land and declared state land
28	Tzufin	2010	Private Land
29	Kedumim	1999	Declared state land
30	Kiryat Arba	2016	Private land
31	Karnei Shomron	1997 לפני שנת	Private land
32	Rehelim	2008	Declared state land
33	Shavei Shomron	2015	Private land
34	Sha'arei Tikva	2014	Private land
35	Sha'arei Tikva	2008	Private land
36	Sha'arei Tikva	2014	Private land
37	Sha'arei Tikva	2015	Private land



Horses grazing in an olive grove belonging to residents of the village of Sanniriya, taken over by settlers from Sha'arei Tikva



An aerial photo of horse stables in Alfei Menashe



An aerial photo of horse stables in Karnei Shomron

Conclusion>>

Since the outbreak of the Second Intifada toward the end of the year 2000, there has been a sharp increase in the amount of professional horse farms and private stables in settlements and outposts in the West Bank. The data presented in this report indicates that a large amount of farms and stables were established on privately owned Palestinian land whose owners were dispossessed after 2000. In many cases, the settlers invaded the land and established the stables, retroactively receiving military backing. Yet in a few more grave instances, the army was responsible for the dispossession, following declaration of the areas as security buffer zones. This status was intended to permit landowners to access their land through proper coordination of entry with the army.

The increase in the amount of professional horse farms in settlements and outposts is part of a broader trend that can be seen within the Green Line. This growth was enabled, first and foremost, thanks to all four HMOs' subsidization of therapeutic riding within the framework of supplemental insurance.

Throughout our survey, we identified 11 professional riding farms (out of 29) that were illegally established on private Palestinian-owned land following the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Today, HMOs are working with no fewer than seven horse farms built illegally on private Palestinian-owned land. As such, national health funds transferred to HMOs inadvertently supporting violent legal transgressions that continue to gain momentum.