

Nature and Agriculture in Syria (2)

Part 2 : Mediterranean coastal regions

The Mediterranean coastal region of Syria is characterized by coastal hills of 20 to 30 km in width, sandwiched between 180 km of coast-line and mountain ranges that run parallel to the coast. At high altitudes, the annual precipitation amounts to more than 1,200 mm, and even the coastal plains have over 800 mm in rainfall per year. Due to these climatic conditions, comparatively high relative humidity (more than 65% on average) and low evapotranspiration (under 1,600 mm per year) constitute the main characteristics of this area.

Agriculture in this region is characterized by citrus crops and greenhouse vegetable farming. In particular, citrus, mainly oranges, in this area accounts for more than 90% of all Syria's citrus production. For citrus

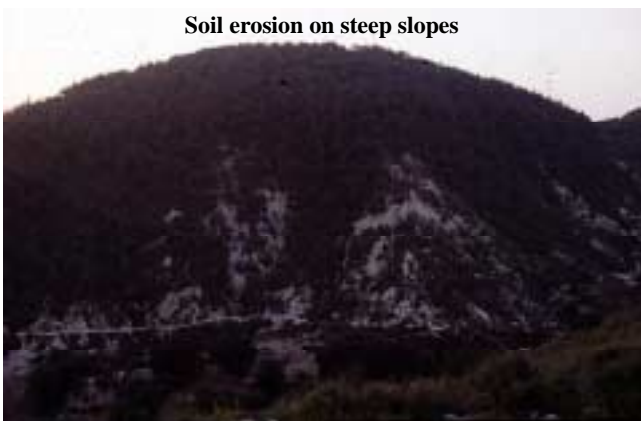
farming, the windbreak around the farm plays an important role, sustaining mild micro-climatic conditions on the land. However, if windbreaks are too thick, they could promote the breeding of pests such as white fly. Therefore, guidance for farmers is necessary, which is based on the results of experiments regarding optimum concentrations of fruit trees and the most suitable citrus fruit for various conditions. Also, in recent years, there has been large-scale damage to the citrus crop caused by the citrus leaf miner. Nonetheless, pest control without pesticides has been proved to be effective, thanks to the development of pest control methods using natural enemies at the agricultural institute. As for greenhouse



Typical view of the Mediterranean coastal area
(citrus in front and olive in the rear)

vegetables, the main crops are winter tomatoes and cucumbers. New irrigation methods such as drip irrigation have been introduced – mainly to greenhouse farmers. However, because there is no sufficient comprehensive training for the operation and maintenance of these systems, the advantages of the new irrigation methods have not been achieved effectively. The promotion of bee keeping, which takes advantage of the year-round warm climate, is an important task as is the promotion of the use of bees to increase production of green house vegetables. Turning now to agricultural land use. Olives are the main crop in this area and are planted on most hills. Tobacco and peanuts are also characteristic features of agriculture in this area. In addition, the agricultural institute is carrying out experimentation to introduce crops such as bananas, coffee and tea. These initiatives have not filtered down to the farmer's level, however, because such crops require the protection by greenhouses during the low temperatures that occur during the winter.

Regarding environmental issues, the main issue is the intrusion of sea water in farmed land. This occurred in the Damsalho area to the north of Latakia city. This area used to have many orchards mainly composed of citrus trees. Due to the over extraction of underground water for the Sports City and hotel development, however, irrigated water quality is deteriorating at speed. Some farms have already been abandoned and salinized land continues to expand. In hill regions, soil conservation on slopes is becoming an important task. Gentle slopes are mostly utilized for olive cultivation and traditional stone-walling techniques are observed. On steep slopes that cannot be used for crop production, soil conservation efforts such as afforestation are being carried out. However, more effective measures are sought, since soil erosion on some of the steep slopes is extremely severe.



Soil erosion on steep slopes



Abandoned farm due to salinization