

Nature and Agriculture in Syria (3)

Part 3 : Mediterranean mountain regions

The mountain range which runs from the south to the north along the Mediterranean coast was formed by geological activities in the Dead Sea rift valley. To the south west of Damascus loom the steep shapes of the Haramoun mountains known for the 2,814m peak Jabal Sheikh. North of Damascus area the Qalamoun mountains rise to peaks of over 2,500m. Mountains disappear at the northern border with Lebanon, however Alawin mountains and Zawiyah mountains stretch on both sides of the Ghab lowland into the north to join mountain areas in Turkey. Rain is concentrated in winter with a large amount of snow fall in high areas that forms water sources.

Mountain areas between Damascus and Beirut are the watershed of the Barada river that flows through Damascus. They are also an important area for the production of fruits such as cherry, apricot and apple. Scattered at the foot of Jabal Sheikh, there are beautiful apple producing villages. Land utilization is advancing into the north mountain areas, and in some places, terraced fields rise up the slopes almost to the peaks, creating magnificent scenery. Silk worms have been reared in some areas for many years, but the silk business has been declining in recent times and many mulberry trees have been replaced with fruit trees. Forests of naturally occurring syndian (*Quercus calliprinos*) are seen in the area, and there are some Lebanese cedar sanctuaries.

One of the universal problems apple growers face is frost damage to flower buds due to low temperatures. People in this area have been taking counter measures which include fumigation using old tires and gasoline, and water sprinkling. Furthermore, the department of agricultural extension has recently undertaken the introduction of anti-frost fans. All apple fields are located in high altitude areas, often near the upper most tributaries of rivers. The use of fertilizers and pesticides in apple growing involves the danger of river water contamination. Regarding forestry, FAO's community afforestation project is underway. The short term goal of this afforestation activity is the production of fodder, fuelwood and fruits. In the long run, afforestation can create windbreaks and can conserve soil and wildlife. One problem of this project is the antagonism that exists between the project's executors and the local people who had previously been utilizing the land in various ways. In the future, it is an important task to develop comprehensive forest management in order to promote sustainable agriculture and stock breeding, attaining the full understanding of the local community.

Finally, related to the WID (Women In Development) issue, women in farming villages in mountain areas spend less time engaged in farming than their female counterparts in villages devoted to agriculture of crops such as wheat and cotton. Therefore, they have a high potential to develop means of acquiring additional income; by processing the fruits and nuts they produce, and by making silk textiles. The positive development of this sort of supplementary income source will be an extremely important task in the future.

