

Nature and Agriculture in Syria (4)

Part 4: Inland plains

On the inland slopes of coastal mountains and at the south foot of the northern hill region, there are stretches of alluvial and basin plains. In winter, there is a relatively good rainfall, and rivers and springs emerge in mountain areas. Summer is blessed with hot and dry climatic conditions, and from ancient times this area has developed as an important granary. One can see vast areas of wheat fields in winter and this scene really deserves the name "the Fertile Crescent".

The main crops of this area are barley, wheat, cotton and sugar beet. Pulses such as chick peas and lentils, and maize are also widely cultivated. Barley can be cultivated with rain water, however, summer crops such as cotton and maize require irrigation. The main characteristic of this area's agriculture is that excess crops and residue (e.g. stubble) from the fields are utilized as an important resource for livestock fodder. From the beginning of Spring to the beginning of Summer, livestock grazes on natural vegetation. When wheat cultivation is over, livestock is brought into the wheat fields. After eating what is left on the land, livestock is moved to other summer crop areas. After they have fed on the residue of the cotton crop they are fed artificially during the winter, waiting for the growth of natural vegetation in spring.



As far as land use is concerned, the important key to promotion of sustainable agricultural development in the future is a shift in direction away from existing overly exploitative agricultural methods involving wheat and cotton rotation. Although it seems to be necessary to revise basic crop rotation patterns, it is not always easy since these major crops are planted according to production plans formulated by the Government. Sometimes these production plans prevent implementation of adequate crop rotation patterns. In the future, it is necessary for concerned governmental bureaux to co-ordinate their activities with a view to realizing efficient and sustainable land use. In order to develop agriculture that keeps soil fertile, the active introduction of leguminous crops in rotation is desirable, although this has not been very successful because it is difficult harvesting such crops using machinery. Given this, it is highly important to develop organic farming methods, rationally combining crops and livestock production. For this, research needs to be further promoted regarding the use of animal manure, green manures and also recycled fertilizers. Regarding water use, salinization on irrigated land has become an extremely serious problem. Once salt accumulates on the surface of soil, huge costs are incurred should the land be improved. An important task for the time being is to establish a water management system which prevents the accumulation of salt. To realize this, it is necessary to formulate and introduce sound water supply systems that fit cropping patterns. It is also necessary to consolidate water management at the field level, with farmer's groups voluntarily maintaining irrigation channels. There has been a new and interesting experiment which aims to use salinised soil effectively by introducing salt-resistant crops and establishing fish farming.