

Agriculture in the Dhofar Region, Oman (2)

Part 2: Agriculture in the Salalah plain

Farming in the Salalah plain mainly occurs around Salalah city, which is the capital of the Dhofar region, and in Taqah in the east. As can be seen in the satellite image, the cultivated area is divided into two kinds: traditional fruit and vegetable farming (indicated in mosaic red along the coast), and new large-scale grassland (shown in clear red patches in the interior). In traditional farming areas, farmers grow fruit such as bananas, coconut palms and papayas (which are the main produce of Oman), and vegetables such as radishes, tomatoes, cucumbers and mint. Fodder is grown for household consumption. Water is brought by basin irrigation using irrigation channels.



Satellite image (false color): Distribution of cultivated areas around Salalah city. (The red parts are cultivated areas.)

Irrigation water is pumped from shallow wells 5 meters underground and brought to the crop land using channels. Much of the fruit grown in this area is shipped to Muscat and lots of other produce is consumed in and around the Dhofar region. These farms are generally owned by Omanis, but the daily work and management is entrusted to workers from Pakistan and India.

Large-scale grass farms popping up in recent years aim to produce fodder for milk cows and are run as national policy corporations. Water is piped from deep wells dug around the farms and distributed by devices such as center pivot sprinklers and rain guns.

However, there is a downside to this. As the large-scale grass farming expands using a large quantity of water, the problem of sea water intrusion has become obvious. Moreover, because of their coastal location, it is the traditional farming areas that are affected by the sea water intrusion which follows the lowering of the water table. An investigation by the water resource ministry also revealed that between 1974 and 1992, the percentage of areas with good quality underground water (0~2,000 ppm) had decreased from 42% to 23% of the area concerned (About 50km to the east and west and around 10km to the north and south from Salalah city). This tendency is prominent in areas around newly developed farms that use a large quantity of water.



Traditional cropland: There are three levels - coconut palms in the highest level, fruit trees such as bananas and papayas in the middle, and vegetables or grass at the ground level.



Fruit shops which sell directly from farms.