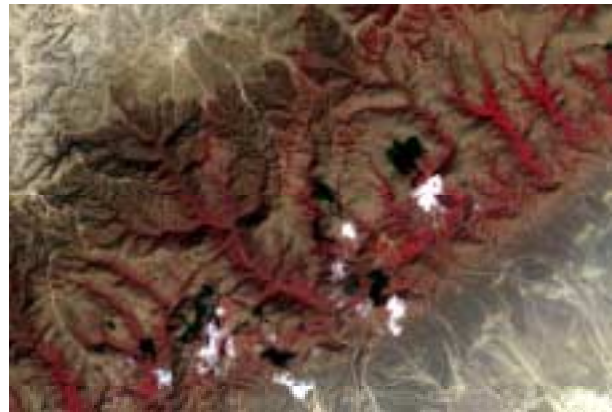


Agriculture in the Dhofar Region, Oman (3)

Part 3: Live stock farming in the Jabal Mountain Range

In the mountain range called Jabal in the north of Salalah, grazing livestock on pasturage has been extensively practiced since ancient times. Within Jabal, which is part of Dhofar State, fairly rich vegetation occurs in the monsoon-blessed area stretching approximately 20 km north-south and 80 km east-west, and this is where the grazing is practiced. The main livestock kept by farmers are cows for meat and milk. Also, camels are kept by 30% of the farmers, and goats by 20%. The most important livestock are cattle, which are well looked after by the heads of households and grazed and fed mixed fodder and dried fish. It is even said that the cows are regarded as more precious than the farmers' own children. On the other hand, camels which are also looked after by the heads of households are becoming less important. Compared to cows, camels have fewer uses for people, and camels are given fodder only when it is needed to supplement the grazing on pasturage. It is mainly children and women's work to look after goats (kept for meat and milk), and the goats are fed by free grazing only. Each family lives in a house which serves both as cattle shed and human residence, surrounded by a fenced yard for keeping young calves etc.



Satellite image of Jabal (November 1994): the dark red indicates natural forests and the light red indicates grasslands

These livestock are raised mainly by grazing them on the natural vegetation of the mountain range, and in the season of scarce pasture the cattle are moved to neighbouring regions (northwards or southwards) in search of more grass. It is said that today this type of traditional pasturage has declined due to an increase in artificial fodder supplied by humans. However, in the monsoon season which renders the region around Salalah greener, one can see a lot of livestock (especially camels) coming down from the mountains. Apart from livestock farming, frankincense and honey are famous and very expensive farm products from this region. In the monsoon season, locally grown cucumbers and mushrooms also enter the market. In addition, compost made from cow dung, though not called an agricultural product, is an important income source for local farmers. (See AAINews Vol. 2 for details about frankincense)

In 1994, the number of livestock in this region was reported as amounting to 147,000 cows, 47,000 camels and 89,000 goats, but numbers are thought to have increased since then. Local people try to amass more and more cattle, regarding them not as a mere income source but rather as a form of property. However, the current number of cattle clearly exceeds the natural carrying capacity of the region's pasturage. It is readily apparent that the natural vegetation is rapidly degrading due to the practice of free grazing. Locals recall that until about two decades ago, Jabal was covered with thick forest and grassland - so dense that one could easily get lost if one left the path. Although both farmers themselves and relevant agricultural authorities admit the fact that overgrazing is occurring, no proper measures seem to have been taken so far. Only in a few areas the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fishries in Salalah is carrying out small-scale projects such as tree planting to recover the lost vegetation, and the preservation of some areas for seed production.



Jabal in monsoon season: everywhere covered with grass



Jabal in dry season: formerly green now reverted to brown soil