

## Agriculture in the Dhofar Region, Oman (6)

### Part 6: Future tasks and directions for agricultural 'development' in Dhofar

Nowadays maintaining self-sufficient economic and agricultural communities is almost impossible in most areas and Dhofar is no exception. History has proved that it is difficult for self-sufficient forms of agriculture to endure, particularly so in the face of current systems which are characterized by large scale intensive forms of agricultural production (exploitative agriculture). It may sound an exaggeration, but it is true to a great extent that the farming activities in Dhofar, developed and practiced over hundreds of years, are facing extinction as a result of the drastic social changes of the past two decades. It is too grave a task to come up with all the solutions here, but I would like to examine the current agricultural problems and potential solutions in Dhofar, as well as make some personal observations.

In the Dhofar region the traditional form of agriculture (sustainable, but limited in terms of productivity due to natural / environmental restrictions) is being over taken by more modernized forms of agriculture (problematic in terms of sustainability, but with a productive capacity greatly expanded due to human technology). The following table is a summary of the current problems, challenges and measures being taken. It also shows the environmental conditions and perceptions of the local people in the region.

Region	Environmental changes and conditions	People's social perceptions	Measures currently taken
Salalah	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Lowering ground water level due to water pumping for recently created pasture land</li> <li>2) Increasing salt levels in ground water</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Consumers are happy with milk (supply)</li> <li>2) Farmers are in trouble, but other people (not personally experiencing any injuries or facing risks) have little concern</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Investigation into ground water quality</li> <li>2) Transfer of existing pasture land to Nejd (plan)</li> </ol>
Jabal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Increasing number of cattle</li> <li>2) Decline in forest areas</li> <li>3) Illegal logging for fuel wood</li> <li>4) Shortage of natural pasture</li> <li>5) Increasing amount of harmful plants</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Local people do not see the increase of cattle as a problem</li> <li>2) Decreasing forest areas and shortage of pasture are seen as a problem in terms of how they diminish cattle feed</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Establishment of natural vegetation reserve for seed production</li> <li>2) Consultation / guidance for the locals</li> <li>3) Elimination of harmful plants</li> </ol>
Nejd	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Lowering water pressure in the third aquifer (Lowering ground water levels)</li> <li>2) Increasing salinity of pasture land soil</li> <li>3) Lack of machine maintenance capacity</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The number of local people is small</li> <li>2) There are few local farmers (those who are engaged in agriculture are workers brought in from other countries)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Restrictions on opening up new farmland</li> <li>2) Restrictions on digging new wells</li> <li>3) Establishment of pilot farms</li> <li>4) Investigation of ground water resources</li> </ol>

It can be seen from this table that clear problems and challenges exist. Sufficient counter measures, however, are not being taken. The reasons for this in turn can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Lack of personnel who could plan and undertake projects. In other words, the problems are perceived but cannot be quantified due to the lack of capable manpower, and this leads to a situation where the real dangers are neglected.
- 2) Lack of communication and information exchange between relevant authorities and other concerned parties. The information owned by each organization involved is not being made full use of. Even within the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, different sections are not aware of each other's on-going agricultural projects.
- 3) The authorities are not willing to be actively involved in development programmes for the Jabal region. This is because, due to past civil war experience, apparently the central authorities tend to avoid contact with the mountain tribes or turn a blind eye to matters which are likely to cause controversy among the Jabal locals.
- 4) The local people's sense of values ( in this case relating to cattle and farmland) are very different from ours. For them, cattle are not merely an income source but are also valuable property in themselves. Therefore local people believe it is important to invest fortune to increase the number of cattle even if they know they may not be able to sell them in the long run.
- 5) Whatever measures may be offered to alleviate their problems, local people tend not to co-operate unless they are first shown visible achievements and the benefits they can derive personally.
- 6) People in the Nejd region still seem to believe that there are inexhaustible amounts of water. Also in this region water resources are not investigated sufficiently (partly for reasons related to 1).

With the current situation described above in mind, then, from now on what kind of ideas and actions are necessary? In order to discuss the future of agriculture in Dhofar taking into account the above problems and the various local conditions, it is inevitable that we consider not only agricultural development but also the issues relating to the environment and resources conservation. (P.T.O)