

# AAINews

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## *Horticultural Therapy in Syria. ~Let us make our dreams come true ~*

Horticultural therapy is a rehabilitation method for physically or mentally handicapped people that involve gardening or horticultural work. Since the old days horticulture has been employed as a therapy mainly for mental patients, as part of their outdoor activities during their treatment. After the Second World War, this method was studied as “horticultural therapy” in Europe and North America. Today its effectiveness is widely recognized and “horticultural therapist” is a socially accepted qualification in the US. Recently in Japan too, medical and welfare establishments as well as local government bodies, are showing increasing interest in this form of therapy as a caring method for the disabled and the aged.

The expected effects of horticultural therapy include physical rehabilitation deriving from the physical work of gardening, and emotional stabilization through the moderate stimuli to the patient’s senses coming from the smells, colors, visuals, and textures. In addition, it is expected to contribute to intellectual development, as patients gain knowledge and techniques of horticulture and their observation, decision-making and planning ability can be improved through the process. It also helps the patients fulfil their desire to do something for someone, to be needed by someone or for some work.

What is important in horticultural therapy is the process rather than its results: while “horticulture” normally aims to produce and appreciate the results (end products), “horticultural therapy” puts more importance on the process. That is, the main objective is not to evaluate the quality or quantity of the final products, but to induce as many positive effects as possible to the patients through the process of growing vegetables and flowers. It is very important that through the horticultural work the patients are healed, feel better, and gain a sense of achievement that they can indeed do something. Therefore it is necessary to make different programs according to the ability and the degree of handicap of each patient. It is also necessary to make plans not only of the actual horticultural activities, that is, as to what to be planted and when and how, but also other events following the work including harvesting of vegetables, food parties with the harvests, and drawing flowers or making bouquets.

Recently, in collaboration with some JICA experts and JICA volunteer, we started making a field for horticultural therapy at a welfare facility for mentally challenged people in Kodseiya, near Syria’s capital Damascus. The work was not that simple, starting from weeding, ploughing, putting down compost and fertilizers, seeding, to making seedlings, plus watering and making plates for fencing. We started at 3 pm, and with a break we finished after 6 pm, completing a neat field.

While working in a country like Syria, we often face various problems and worries. On such occasions I feel that rather than struggling to do something alone, it would be far more effective if we could work closely with other JICA experts and volunteers. When two people with the same sense of values or way of thinking meet, sometimes the combination may make more than two. This is the very value, and fun, in the collaboration of two or more people, I think. When we try to do something, first there is some sort of dream, or ideal, and then we come to think of the ways and means necessary to realize it. The horticultural therapy project in Syria so far has taken its first step only, but depending on how it is promoted, it may have the potential to make a big difference in the way of technical assistance as well as the system of nursing and treatment of the disabled in Syria. I am secretly hoping that this will become a “everybody’s” dream project, to let all of us have dreams come true.  
(By KOTO in Syria, December 2000)



**Making plates for fencing**



**Putting down compost and fertilizers**



**Seeding**

## *In Search of the Blue Bird; What is it that you long for?*

### **Part 2: WTO and the market economy**

“Here all kinds of happiness are available. Happiness to have money, happiness to lazily fool around, happiness to eat without hunger, to drink without thirst, and happiness to make others unhappy.”  
“These are not happiness at all! If they are what you call happiness, I want none of them!”

As one of the indicators of poverty, people often refer to money and other material possessions. The World Trade Organization (WTO) attempts to control the movement of goods by programming the monetary economy on a worldwide scale (see page 4 for an outline of the WTO). What is the WTO, and what kind of influence does it have? Is it something which brings us “dreams”, “hope” or “happiness”? During the period of its preceding structure, GATT, it was aiming at liberalization of world trade, but agricultural products were excluded from its target items. This was because, unlike industrial manufacture which can be measured on a uniform scale and standard wherever it occurs, agricultural production is influenced by various climatic and other natural features and different countries have different conditions for their agricultural activities. Therefore, the comparative production theory, which suggests that commodities of relatively cheaper production costs should be produced domestically and other commodities should be imported for the sake of trade and economic efficiency, could not be readily applied to agricultural products. However, in the 1980s when there was a surplus of agricultural products in many parts of the world, the former “sanctuary” of agricultural sectors also started to be targeted by the trade liberalization movement, mainly from exporting countries with strong agricultural productivity. That it is better, from the global (in fact, American) viewpoint, to treat the world’s agricultural market as one and to let countries with higher efficiency in production supply the market, is their logic.

Developing countries are flooded with consumer goods that they are compelled to buy from developed countries. Electric appliances, cars, clothes, etc. from developed countries look attractive to the eyes of those in developing countries, and are in high demand. However, you have to have money to purchase them. Then, you have to find a way earn cash. Then, even those engaged in agriculture in developing countries start producing cash crops, even sacrificing their traditional life patterns (i.e. self-sufficient production system) and the natural environment, solely in order to earn cash.

On the other hand Japan, one of the exporters of such foreign industrial products to developing countries, has started to see a huge amount of agricultural products (with the exception of rice) flowing into the country from outside as a result of tariff reform. Domestic agricultural products in Japan, which are far costlier - as the high production costs and salaries are reflected in the prices -cannot compete in the international market. With imports of cheap agricultural products into the domestic market, the profits for domestic farmers decline drastically, leading them to give up agriculture. This is already happening in reality. As a result, an increasing amount of farmlands will be left unmanaged, and the unattended lands will be impoverished and lose their ecological functions. In developing countries also, under the name of “globalization” and “the market economy” regional individualities are collapsing with farmlands left spoilt, while people’s lives are not necessarily attaining the “wealth / affluence” they long for.

Looking at it this way, the participation in the WTO system means there are some people who gain benefit / profit from the system, for example many of those in developed countries, but at the same time there are a number of people in developing countries who are forced to sacrifice their traditional lifestyles in the name of trade liberalization. Also, the WTO system may contribute to creating a terrifying uniformity in the world by breaking up regional individualities and traditions. WTO mentions the importance of prevention of environmental destruction due to development for trade globalization, but it is highly questionable whether it considers the crucial necessity of retaining the ecological functions of existing agricultural lands.

(Continued in page 4)

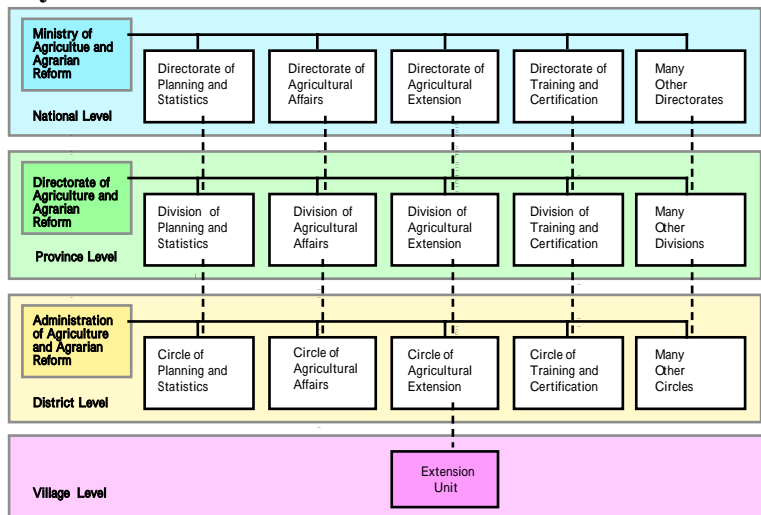


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## Agricultural extension and training for agricultural extension agents in Syria

### Part 2: Agricultural extension system in Syria

In Syria the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, which was established by merging the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, is in charge of the entire agricultural administration. The agricultural extension system is being set up under the auspices of the Directorate of Agricultural Extension. In terms of the organizational structure of agricultural administration, as shown in the table, the same structure at the central government level is copied at the provincial and district levels. This means, for example, the agricultural extension division of the provincial level comes under both the central and provincial directorates, as if the division has two heads. The Agricultural Extension Division is divided into four sections, namely the Technical Section, Media Section, Planning Section and Home Economics Section. This structure is again the same at the provincial and district level. At the village level, branch offices called Extension Units are placed, and each Extension Unit takes charge of several villages, sometimes presiding over as many as ten villages.



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One of the main activities of agricultural extension is the nation-wide study led by the Technical Section on various problems faced by farmers in different types of agriculture. Based on the findings they are trying to better understand the current situation of agriculture in Syria and to draw up appropriate agricultural extension programs. One of the actual promotion activities in the field is the so-called Field Day demonstration in collaboration with experiment and research institutions. On such occasions, under the initiative of agricultural extension workers, researchers and innovative farmers present the results of their experiments, and also there are some other activities to show appropriate technologies in the field. The Media Section provides various types of information to farmers through the mass media such as radio and TV, and it also conducts a unique activity in the form of a mobile theater group. The group, which consists of agricultural extension workers, goes around villages and performs musical pieces of different content which change depending on the target region and the season. The musical performance has become very popular especially in remote areas with little entertainment, and the troupe can get quite a large audience.

In this way or the other, in Syria great efforts are being made to establish an agricultural extension system, and the number of the Extension Units is as many as 800, with some 4000 staff involved. If this system works efficiently and effectively, no doubt it will play a significant role in the agricultural development of Syria. In reality, however, there are a number of problems which still need to be overcome one by one, and among these the main ones are as follows:

- \* The role of the Agricultural Extension Directorate within the Ministry of Agriculture is not clear, neither is the role of each section under the Directorate, and that of each staff member within each section. Besides, the division of responsibilities between the central, prefecture, district, and Extension Unit levels is also not clear-cut.
- \* Collaboration between the Agricultural Extension Directorate and other related directorates is so weak that the information about farmers' problems held at the Agricultural Extension Directorate is not shared with other directorates, and results gained by the latter are not incorporated into the agricultural extension activities.
- \* There is no systematic training of agricultural extension workers, and the knowledge and experience of those staff who participated in training courses or seminars inside or outside the country are not effectively shared.
- \* Due to the planned economic system, production of the main crops is still controlled by the government, and agricultural extension workers are seen as a watchdog of implementation of the prescribed crop production plan. This makes it difficult to establish a good working relationship between farmers and extension workers.
- \* With an insufficient budget for the agricultural extension activities, they tend to depend on financial support from development aid donors. The Agricultural Extension Directorate, with little ownership, tends to suffer problematic dealings with the donors, and it appears to be inviting "development aid hazards".



## ***In Search of the Blue Bird; What is it that you long for? (continued from page 2)***

Even though it shows certain consideration for the environmental impact of new development projects, for example WTO does not recognize / evaluate the ecological functions of existing paddy fields such as their water resources recharge functions. Therefore, there is a gap between WTO's view of development and the recent philosophy of rural or regional development, which recognizes and stresses the importance of such concepts as "sustainability", "ecologically sound agriculture", "small scale", and "regional individuality". More serious discussions are needed within the WTO with more consideration being given to regional individuality, long-term environmental problems and resources.

WTO argues that the criticisms such as "WTO is an instrument for the rich and powerful to dictate to the world", "WTO will destroy the existing employment system", or "WTO ignores people's interest in health, environment and development issues", are often based on a fundamental misunderstanding about WTO's functions. Summarized below is what WTO sees as its benefits to the world, and the most frequent misunderstandings.

### **10 benefits expected from (and by) WTO**

1. The multilateral trade regime will help promote world peace
2. Conflicts will be dealt with constructively
3. The WTO rules and regulations will make people's lives easier (affordable)
4. Freer trade will reduce the costs of living for people in the world
5. The multilateral trade regime will increase the quantity of commodities in trade and thus the number of choices
6. Trade will increase people's incomes
7. Trade will stimulate economic growth
8. Having fundamental principles (of trade) will make people's lives more efficient
9. Governments will be protected from political dispute using trade issues
10. The multilateral trade regime will foster non-corrupt, upright governments

### **10 major misunderstandings about WTO**

1. WTO will dictate trade policies
2. WTO is a free-trade supremacist organization
3. WTO places more importance on commercial profit rather than on development
4. WTO places more importance on commercial profit rather than on the environment
5. WTO places more importance on commercial profit rather than on health and safety (security) issues
6. WTO will destroy the existing employment system and aggravate poverty
7. Under the WTO regime smaller (economically weaker) countries are left helpless
8. WTO is an instrument for powerful lobbying organizations
9. Weaker countries will be forced to join WTO
10. WTO is a non-democratic regime

Will then the WTO really be helpful in improving people's lives in developing countries? By joining WTO, won't they be just introduced to a mere materialistic world? Is WTO really necessary for people in developing countries to survive, retaining the wealth of life in the real sense? Isn't it a shorter and sure way to achieve "wealth / affluence" (or "happiness"), to stay away from the WTO regime and avoid the international competition?

### **Outline of the World Trade Organization (WTO)**

WTO was established in 1995 to take over from GATT, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which had been in place since just after WWII. GATT was always a provisional set-up without any legal foundation, but under GATT a multilateral trade regime was formed. The trade regime started in the field of commodity trade, and from 1947 to 1994 GATT was a place to negotiate tariff reduction and other trade obstacles. The trade regime developed through such trade negotiations at so-called GATT Rounds. The main negotiation point of earlier GATT Rounds was tariff reduction, but later on other issues related to international trade, such as anti-dumping and non-tariff treatment were also dealt with. The Uruguay Round held between 1986 and 1994 led to the establishment of the WTO, which has become a legally founded international organization dealing with international trade issues in general, incorporating the functions of GATT (trade in commodities) and GATS: General Agreement on Trade in Services (trade in services). It was established as the only international organization to deal with the global rules of international trade, and the various agreements under GATT remain valid as part of the WTO agreement.

The main function and objective of WTO is to ensure that trade transactions flow as smoothly and as predictably as possible. As a result, it is expected that both consumers and producers can enjoy a stable supply and wider choices of final products, parts or raw materials as well as various services. Supposedly under the WTO regime both producers and exporters can assume international markets will continue to open up, which WTO expects to contribute to realizing a more hopeful, peaceful and predictable world economy. In general WTO's decisions are taken with the consensus of all the WTO parties, and have to be ratified by the governments of each member country. Trade frictions can be dealt with by WTO's conflict arbitration procedures, and this function is expected to prevent the trade conflicts from developing into political or military conflicts.

By reducing trade obstructions, WTO also aims at breaking down various trade barriers between people or countries. As mentioned above, this system is known as a multilateral trade regime, and its core is the WTO agreement. This agreement was negotiated and signed by most of the trading countries in the world and ratified by their governments. That is, it provides basic legal rules regarding international commercial trade and serves as a contract to secure the signatories' important trade interests. Also, it has binding power over the parties to restrict their domestic trade policy within the allowance of the WTO agreement in order to maximize everybody's profit / benefit. In other words, WTO's goal is to improve the welfare of the people of the signatory nations, by facilitating more efficient trade activities on the part of producers, exporters and importers of commodities and services.