

# Palestinian Agriculture Under Occupation

*The Palestinian Agricultural Engineers Union sent a memorandum to the Federation of Arab Agricultural Engineers, about the state of agriculture in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.*

The memo pointed out that the area of the West Bank is approximately 5000 km<sup>2</sup>. The area fit for agriculture is 70% of this, while only 40% of the 5000 km<sup>2</sup> is actually cultivated, i.e., 2 million dunums. However, before occupation the total land cultivated was 2.7 million dunums. This obvious drop of about 26% is an inevitable result of the nature of the situation imposed by the Zionist occupation forces «who from the beginning of occupation intentionally concentrated on the land and the people» to force the citizens to leave their land and replace them with Zionist settlers.

When the Zionist military forces took over the responsibility of administration of the agricultural sectors in the West Bank, it set to intentionally destroying the agricultural system followed by the Arab farmers (planting melons), forcing them to plant crops which were essential to Zionist industry e.g. sesame seed, onions, etc. after all the land was cultivated according to this demand, the Zionists would refuse to buy the crops cultivated, making excuses about the bad quality of the products, at the same time trying to persuade the farmers to leave this unprofitable way of earning a living, and to work in Zionist factories which would provide them with a better income.

The memo underscored the fact that the Zionist authorities confiscated 50% of the non-agricultural land and of agricultural land not yet cultivated. It also imposed stricter measures on the use of water for irrigation whereby it prohibited the digging of wells and limited the quantity of water used for agricultural purposes. These measures drove the farmers to plant fruit bearing trees (such as olives, grapes, almonds, etc.) which need minimum quantities of water.

This resulted in increasing the area planted with olive trees from 600,000 dunums to 750,000 in 1984. Farmers also went back to planting melons (muskmelon and watermelon) bringing the total area used for this purpose to



*Zionist settlements thrive on confiscated Palestinian land*

35,000 dunums, keeping in mind it had dropped to zero within the first few years of occupation. The memo also pointed out that the measures imposed by the Zionists resulted in the Palestinian farmers' facing the challenge of limited means of irrigation, production, etc., by resorting to modern techniques of agriculture (irrigation sprinklers and greenhouses) in order to raise production rates while decreasing costs. Production rates reached an all time high after applying these techniques, thus making up for the inability to use greater

areas of land for agriculture. One dunum of land produced 5-6 tons of watermelons; about 6 tons of tomatoes; and about 4 tons of muskmelons.

## The Gaza Strip

In the Gaza Strip, the area of land utilized for agriculture is now 632,000 dunums which is 50% of the overall area of the region. Only 56% of the above mentioned area is irrigated, although the Gaza Strip depends primarily on the production of citrus fruits: 300,000 tons of crop from a total of 71,579 dunums of land.

Other crops of the Gaza Strip are guava and dates, in addition to citrus fruits. Ninety percent of the income in this region is from agriculture. A major problem faced by the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is how to market the surplus of agricultural production which is much higher than needed to cover local needs. The memo goes on to explain that the surplus is allowed to be sent to Jordan upon obtaining special permits from the Jordanian authorities...

However, the time limit for farmers who want to send their crop from the West Bank to Jordan is set before the actual harvest; moreover due to sudden unexpected changes of weather (e.g.

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