

Until a few years ago the dominant form of irrigation in the Jordan Valley was through the archaic system of furrow canals. Richer farmers to the south used the sprinkler system which, under conditions of limited water resources, could be quite wasteful. This is how the irrigation situation was in Zbeidat in the mid-seventies:

Water for irrigation is supplied by a commonly-owned well with diesel pump situated in the center of the village. Water is discharged from the well and distributed to the individual plots via unlined dirt canals. Some farmers irrigate their crops with conventional open furrows and others attempt to economize on water by excavating small earthen pools in which they store their weekly allocation of irrigation water. This water is then pumped to their fields with small booster pumps and then distributed to their plants by annually-disposable plastic tubes. (Quiring, 1978:2).

Under canal irrigation -- which prevailed in Marj Na'je and Zbeidat until 1976 -- the distribution of water rights took an intricate form based on the notion of "shares" (ashum, sing., sahm). In cases where the source belongs to the village in common ownership the farmer's share correspond to the amount of dunums owned as a ratio of total land cultivated.

The situation differs however, when the land is share-cropped. If the source of water is a spring or a wadi the landlord, who usually owns the source, usually insisted on enforcing the traditional distribution system based on fasl (unit):

The fasl entitles each holder of a water right to take the whole flow of the water channel for a certain period of time (normally it is for 12 hours, though sometimes it is for 6 hours or even 3 hours. In certain cases the whole channel is divided into two main canals...under these circumstances the fasl entitles each holder of a water right to take the whole flow of the one canal for the period agreed upon (UNRWA, 1956:20).