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AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEST BANK

ABSTRACT

The West Bank has a unique geography characterized by rough topography, erratic rainfall and scarcity of "available" irrigation water. About 96 percent of all cultivated area is dependent on rainfall, and because of severe restrictions on water use there is little scope for expanding irrigated agriculture in the near future.

Rainfed patterns of agriculture are characterized by low profitability, high risk margins and the need for large amounts of labour. This study has demonstrated that only a few patterns of rainfed farming (e.g. grapes, cantaloupe, sheep) are profitable at a commercial scale, where others command, at most, modest profit margins.

Development of West Bank agriculture is hampered by a severe conflict on local resources, especially land, water and labour. By exercising control on the West Bank's economic and institutional structures, Israel has been able to enact a wide range of policies bearing on land and water use, finance, marketing, and agricultural services, all serving Israel's interests, often at the expense of local inhabitants.

The argument for reactivating rainfed farming in the West Bank is justified more by political and sociological motives than by pure economic incentives. Accordingly, the cost for developing agriculture may be viewed as a national liability rather than an entrepreneurial activity. This entails strong commitments to provide ample finance at subsidized terms, establish stronger trading relations with Jordan, and provide more vigorous support to cooperatives, educational and research institutions.

This research describes a strategy for development of West Bank agriculture within a scenario of continued occupation, and describes institutional changes which are deemed necessary to facilitate agricultural development. It also contains a detailed list of projects and measures aimed at reactivating specific sectors of agriculture. The ensuing financial obligations for implementing the proposed developments are estimated at JD 20 millions, amortized over a period of three years. The researcher believes that anticipated returns warrant the projected costs.