

Israel. In fact, much of the wheat produced locally is sold in Israel itself where a floor price is guaranteed to producers. Consequently, West Bank markets derive from Israeli mills more than two thirds of the flour they sell in local markets.

The problem of excessive dependence on imports for such a vital commodity as flour constitutes a major challenge not only to the West Bank, but to the Arab World at large. A recent study has revealed that Arab countries import about 40 - 50 percent of their aggregate wheat demand, and that their "wheat gap" rose from 10 million tons in 1975 to 13.6 million tons in 1980.¹ According to the same study, it is estimated that these countries import about 10 percent of all wheat traded in international channels, although their share of world population does not exceed 4 percent. Being one of the least endowed with arable land resources, the West Bank is not expected to make substantial progress towards bridging its own wheat deficit.

Cultural practices

Wheat is produced under extremely diversified levels of cultural practice. In areas where it is grown on relatively steep terraces, peasants use traditional inputs and techniques, and their produce goes almost totally into family consumption. But in areas of intensive production, where land is reasonably level, farmers have acquired an advanced level of technology which compares well with that in Israel and Jordan. There is, however, ample room for improvement.

1. Ibrahim Abdullah, The main pivots of the process of socio-economic development in the Arab World during the coming two decades 1980-2000, (Kuwait: The Arab Planning Institute, 1980) p 5.

Seed sown by farmers is procured in the open market, since the Department of Agriculture sells less than 5 percent of the required seed stock. Seed sold by the Department is certified for productivity, quality, and cleanliness from foreign seed and seed-borne diseases, whereas seed procured from other sources is not adequately certified in those regards. Varieties are all of solid strains, most common of which are Anber, 870 and 304.

Seed-bed preparation is performed mostly by modern machinery. This is facilitated by the presence of custom machine services in Jenin and Hebron districts. Sowing follows mostly the early showers of November and early December. The erratic pattern of rain distribution may cause serious problems to producers. A particularly serious hazard is sudden and prolonged drought following seed emergence.

Late in winter, farmers begin their campaign against weeds. In the vast majority of commercial fields this is accomplished by using chemical weed killers, whereas on smaller plots weeding is done manually using female labour. By late May the harvest season begins, and it continues through to the end of June. On smaller fields, and where land is too steep, farmers still use sickles for this purpose. Threshing in this case is accomplished by stationary machines driven by tractor power-belts. In areas of commercial grain production, farmers use modern combines which simultaneously do the threshing and harvesting.

Productivity of wheat (and other field crops) has improved during recent years. In areas of sub-commercial production, it may not have shown a significant increase, since it continues to hover