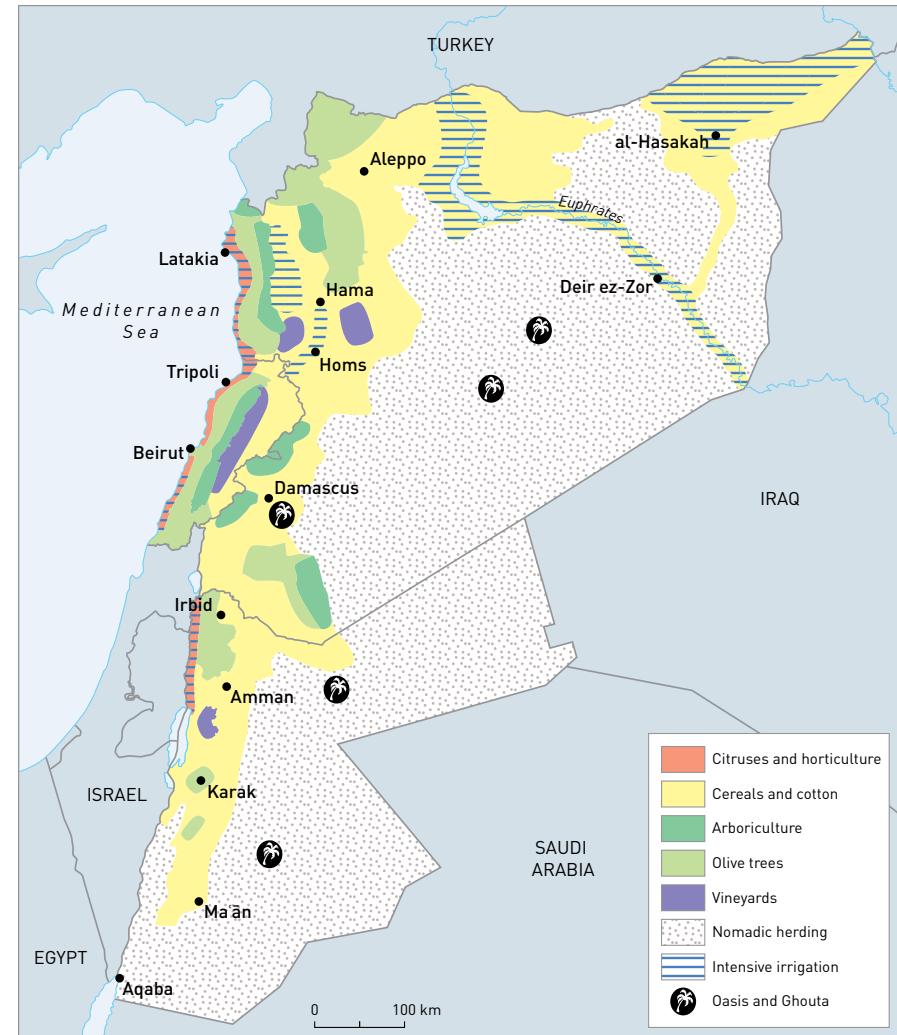


A Threatened Farming Sector

Though it was the cradle of agriculture in the Neolithic period, the Fertile Crescent is no longer able to feed its population. The countries of the Near East, like all countries in the Arab world, have had to resort to the massive importation of food products. This dependence has grown as the population increases, while agricultural production has declined as a result of the reduction of water resources allocated to agriculture. In an effort to protect itself from global market fluctuations in agricultural products, Jordan began to rent land from Sudan and Uganda, like Egypt and the Gulf countries that have given up on food self-sufficiency solely from their own national territory. Ba'athist Syria has continued the myth of food self-sufficiency perhaps because it has significant areas of arable land (30 per cent of its territory) and a climate that renders it more independent agriculturally. During the period of Arab nationalism it was even portrayed as one of the great agricultural hopes for the Arab world. In Syria support for agriculture became political, through land reform that broke up the landed estates in favour of small farmers; through policies to establish hydraulic works along the coast, in the Ghab Plain; and especially through the Euphrates project, which aimed to irrigate 640,000 hectares, even though only a third of this was achieved. Jordan is much less well endowed: 4 per cent of its territory is cultivated, and the scarce water resources available for agriculture do not allow for more intensive exploitation, except in the Jordan Valley. As for Lebanon, its situation is paradoxical: it has water and a fourth of its territory is cultivated, but its agriculture has substantially declined. Agriculture has become a marginal element of its GDP because of the lack of organisation in the industrial sectors, the fragmentation of property, the cost of labour, and especially competition from Syrian products flooding the domestic market.

The agricultural sector is no longer the main employer in the Near East: it now represents 8 per cent of the workforce in Lebanon, 10 per cent in Jordan, and 25 per cent in Syria. Agriculture contributes only a limited part of the GDP in Lebanon (5 per cent) and Jordan (2.5 per cent), as opposed to 20 per cent in Syria. However, these figures understate the real importance of agriculture for the greater part of the population that depends on this complementary but indispensable resource. Many public servants are in reality farmers; they go to the office in the morning (the government sector is open from 8 am to

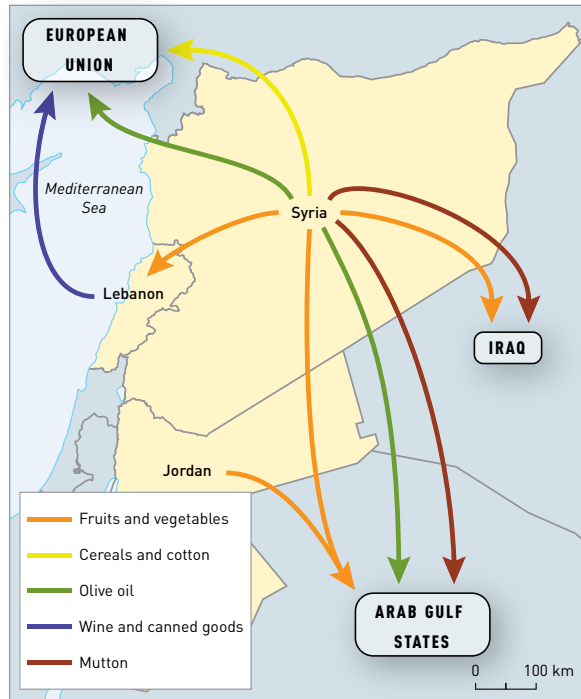
AGRICULTURE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Source: Fabrice Balanche, based on data from the ministries of agriculture of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.

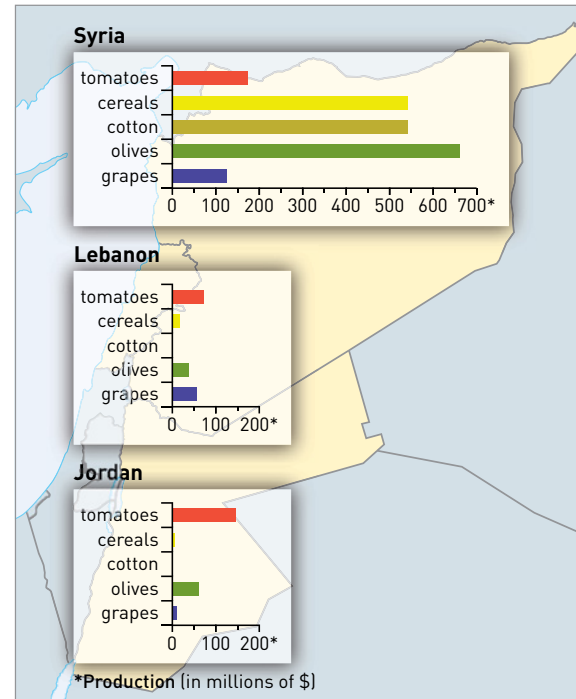
3 pm), and return to their farms in the afternoon. Many derive more income from their farming activities than from their office jobs, but call themselves civil servants rather than farmers—a term with pejorative connotations. This dual activity works to maintain the small farms and hinders modernisation. The land reform law in Syria still limits property to 20 hectares in irrigated areas, and 200 hectares in dry areas. It is certainly possible to circumvent it, but it is an obstacle to the creation of large highly productive capitalist farms

AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS



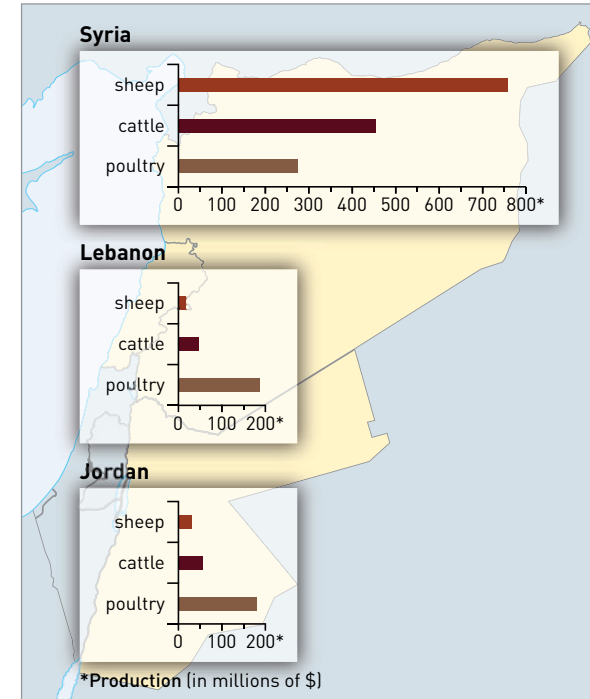
Source: FAO, 2009.

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION



Source: FAO, 2007.

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY



Source: FAO, 2007.

capable of exporting products in which Syria has comparative advantages. The absence of any real freedom of movement for agricultural products in spite of the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), the result of a veiled form of protectionism, is also a hindrance to internal development.

Policies of comparative advantages became prevalent in the Near East as states cut off support to their national agricultural sector. Such countries increasingly export to the Gulf states and the

European Union. Syria is one of the main exporters of olive oil in the Mediterranean basin; it doubled its cultivated areas since 1980. The areas devoted to citrus fruits, after a period of strong development between 1980 and 2000, declined due to the lack of foreign markets and the cost of water in this type of production. The country also exports its purebred Awaz sheep, renowned in the Gulf countries, and imports sheep from Australia or New Zealand for domestic consumption. Since the early 2000s

exports of grain and cotton have been declining as a result of poor weather conditions. Jordan, for its part, has specialised in horticultural production for export to the Gulf countries, particularly tomatoes and cucumbers. As for Lebanon, it exports products of a higher value-added type through a small-scale dynamic food processing industry (fruit juices, wine, appetizer seeds and grains, canned goods, etc.) but also industrial crops (tobacco and sugar) that are often the subject of clientelist state subsidies.