

JPRS 76311
VEINA 2171
8/27/80

SUDAN

PROSPECTS FOR SUDAN'S COTTON ON WORLD MARKET EXAMINED

London AL-DUSTUR in Arabic 2-8 Jun 80 p 37

[Article: "Sudanese Cotton Is No Longer King; Bad Planning Finishes Off What Is Left By Plant Epidemics"]

[Excerpts] Since 1977, the price of cotton has been rising on the world market. It almost reached a record this season. The price of one rotl of raw cotton has risen from 66 cents three years ago to more than 80 cents last month. Observers of the American agricultural commodities exchange believe that the price of cotton will exceed 100 cents, possibly 125 cents per rotl within a few months.

Although cotton exports from the Middle East reached 820,000 bales in 1978, or 17 percent of total world exports, this amount is in a continual and serious decline which threatens to drive a number of states out of the world market for good.

Perhaps the most serious cotton cultivation problem in the region is to be found in the Sudanese project of al-Jazirah, where the peasants lease agricultural plots from the Council of al-Jazirah Project. In al-Jazirah, cotton is the main crop, and represents around two-thirds of Sudanese exports to the outside world. However, the productivity of the feddan in the Sudan has deteriorated seriously in the past four years, and dropped from 25 kilos to 14 kilos per feddan (compared with a productivity of 66 kilos per feddan in neighboring Egypt).

In addition, the Sudanese variety of the crop has deteriorated in quality due to weak control over plant epidemics, poor ginning, and a lack of proper classification of cotton according to degrees of excellence. As a result, importers ask the Sudan to lower its price, while world prices are rising. This season, the Sudan sold more than 300,000 bales of long-staple cotton at prices of the previous season.

The root of the problem in the al-Jazirah project is that the cotton crop is no longer profitable to the peasants, who prefer Sudanese beans and corn (sorghum). The World Bank this year set aside \$30 million to save

the cotton crop in al-Jazirah. This sum will be used to purchase necessary spare parts and equipment, which have been scarce in al-Jazirah.

In Egypt, the problem takes a different form, though it has led to the same result. The agricultural lands reserved for cotton are in continual decline due to urban sprawl and the switch to other crops, especially in areas adjacent to the cities. For this reason, Egyptian exports have declined from 302,000 tons in 1972 to 150,000 tons in the past year. The current ratio of cotton to total Egyptian exports is around 25 percent, whereas it was previously always over 50 percent.

This picture of the Sudan and Egypt reflects a painful reality for Third World nations. These have lost, according to estimates of the World Bank, 2 million feddans of cotton land, and 1.1 million bales of cotton in the Seventies alone.

The American National Cotton Council in New Orleans plans to dominate the world cotton market by 1990. By that time, most cotton-producing nations will have withdrawn from the export market due in part to the needs of their textile industry, and in part to plant epidemics, a lack of agricultural equipment, and a lack of modern organization which plans for the long term.

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