

JPRS 76419

NCINA 2181 9/12/80

LEBANON

REPORT DISCUSSES STEPS TAKEN TO DEVELOP AGRICULTURE

Beirut AL-ANWAR in Arabic 19 Jun 80 p 6

[Article: "Report to Council of Ministers on Developing and Rebuilding Agricultural Sector"]

[Text] Joseph Skaff, the minister of agriculture, has presented to the weekly session of the Council of Ministers a report on the progress of the study concerning rebuilding and developing the agricultural sector and proposing a strategy for medium and long-range agricultural development, in addition to reorganizing the Ministry of Agriculture and the agricultural establishments under its control.

First, Project Implementation and Method of Work:

Implementation was started in three stages on 20 January 1980:

First stage: Preparations for each working team took 3 weeks.

Second stage: Completion of the work [study] by the team of experts took 4 months.

Third stage: Results and recommendations took 7 weeks.

The following method of work was adopted for the experts:

Cooperation by the experts within their teams.

Reliance on the available technical reports.

On-the-spot visits and various contacts with the farmers and the officials.

Works Completed by middle of May 1980:

The agencies of the Ministry of Agriculture were revitalized and a bill was prepared to reorganize them.

A plan was drawn up to rehabilitate the technical apparatus of the Ministry of Agriculture and of its establishments (a total of 50 [study] grants for periods ranging from 2-9 months given).

A plan was drawn up to train agricultural engineers and veterinary doctors (14 long-term study grants for periods of 2-3 years given).

A plan was drawn up for a livestock census (goats, sheep and other livestock).

A plan was drawn up to set up an applied scientific research and guidance center in the sphere of plastic [green] houses for the production of vegetables and other crops out of season.

Future Aspirations:

The impressions gathered from the work of the teams--impressions which will be recorded in the final report--have made it possible to form some tendencies, options and priorities, even though the current situation obstructs every effort to formulate any long-range policy, especially in the absence of real official statistics.

1. General Economic Aspirations for Years 1980-2000:

Two options: The first seeks to attain by the end of the year 2000 a fast pace of economic growth amounting to 7.5 percent (4.1 percent in agriculture).

The second option seeks to attain by the end of the year 2000 a normal pace of economic growth amounting to five percent (3.2 percent in agriculture).

2. Aspirations in Agricultural Sphere:

Food security: Focusing on long-term contracts, securing the means to store grains and refraining from casting doubts on the modest production capabilities.

Increasing the productivity per acreage unit and reducing production costs.

Increasing the Lebanese agricultural exports and maintaining their high quality.

Boosting the rural areas, providing them with the means of subsidy and creating work opportunities in the agricultural and other spheres.

Protecting the environment through formulating a firm and clear-cut policy and through implementing it honestly.

A. At Consumption Level: Internal consumption of the agricultural goods produced will develop as follows by the end of the year 2000:

Chicken meat: Threefold.

At the external level, the exportation of agricultural products to the Arab countries will increase by fourfold or fivefold, provided that the good quality of the production and of packaging is maintained and that the means of technological progress are employed.

B. At Production Level:

The production subject to supply and demand (vegetables, fruits, poultry, improved seeds and ornamental plants) will become effective within the framework of the desired agricultural modernization. This production constitutes the cornerstone in the Lebanese agriculture.

Production for which subsidy is secured (wheat, industrial crops, beets and so forth): The survival of cultivated wheat depends on securing irrigation water for it and the cultivation of beets depends on mechanizing the entire process of beets production, beginning with planting and ending with harvesting.

C. Obstacles and Solutions:

Developing land and water: This development must be balanced by securing the necessary labor. There is no value for (expansion) with the aim of getting new resources if we do not preserve the current resources and prevent their loss. Even though there is a possibility to irrigate 40,000 [more] hectares in the south, the priority requires improving and modernizing the present means of irrigation.

Mechanizing agricultural operations: A complete and profound view for solving the problem of agricultural labor, which is becoming scarce, is needed. It is also required to reduce production costs so as to counter the wave of inflation and of competition. All this requires that efforts be exerted to attract labor to this sphere by all the means.

Finding solutions to preserve the quality of the soil by adopting the systems of agricultural cycles.

Providing incentives to the farmers by way of the agricultural loans establishments (improved seeds, fertilizers and modern means of irrigation and mechanization).

Developing and strengthening the cooperative movement.

Strengthening agricultural guidance on new bases, both in terms of numbers and of qualifications [of agricultural guides].

Securing various resources for the public sector to enable it to face the various obstacles obstructing the growth of the agricultural sector in a

different manner than in the past and to enable it to keep up pace with progress so as to meet the needs of the Lebanese agriculture.

Establishing a firm bond between the ministries of agriculture, water resources, cooperatives, civil organization and the Social Welfare Agency while keeping the Ministry of Agriculture as the basic apparatus for planning, coordination, supervision and implementation in the rural and agricultural sphere.

Preserving and expanding the cultivated area of 100,000 hectares, employing modern means to utilize it and exerting efforts to prevent construction and the opening of roads in this area because Lebanon has lost in the past 25 years nearly 20,000 hectares of its cultivable lands as a result of expanded construction and opening of roads.

Focusing on expanding and preserving the forested area so that it may constitute 20 percent [of Lebanon's area] in the future.

Reorganizing the utilization of pasture lands in which sheep and goats graze to prevent their disappearance.

Defining the needs of the agricultural areas on the basis of recommendations by specialized regional committees formed at the level of districts.

Encouraging the establishments that support the public sector, such as farmer groups and organizations operating in the rural areas, to enhance the living standard of those who work in these areas.

Supplying the fuels used in the agricultural sector at convenient prices so as to reduce production costs.

Seeking the assistance of agricultural economists (to provide statistics and to study production costs).

Taking the direction of centering the light industries in the rural areas.

Followup Stage: This stage calls for completion of the experts' work, considering that we are still awaiting the arrival of the scientific research and horticultural experts before proceeding to write the final report and underline the results. This requires extending the work in the project for 3 more months, in addition to the already scheduled 6 months.

On the other hand, the followup stage called for by the basic document on the strategy seeks to draw up and plan agricultural projects produced by this strategy, to analyze these projects and determine their economic feasibility. This work will be carried out by two experts from the [U.N.] Food and Agriculture Organization who will work for 2-3 years.

Please be advised, keeping in mind that we will continue to discuss the details of this stage with the Reconstruction and Development Board and to cooperate with it closely.

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