

SANDY SOILS

Report of the FAO/UNDP Seminar on
Reclamation and Management of Sandy Soils
in the Near East and North Africa, 1973

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The total area of the Syrian Arab Republic is 18.5 million ha with widely varying soils; it includes Mediterranean red, dark yellow, reddish brown, yellow desert, gypsiferous and levee soils. Sandy soils are scattered in the different soils mentioned above in small areas that have not yet been surveyed.

Syrian soils vary in their characteristics according to origin and mode of formation of each. Work is now being concentrated on soil surveying in areas which benefit or will benefit from the major irrigation projects. The current work is devoted to some detailed surveying to identify soil groups and basic characteristics of each. Up till now a total area of 280 000 ha has been surveyed in the Euphrates Valley, Ghab and El Sen. Work is in progress on the classification of the present irrigated areas and on those which are planned to be irrigated from the Euphrates dam.

The total area that could be cultivated exceeds 7 million ha of which 600 000 ha is irrigated. The rest is under rainfed agriculture using a crop rotation with fallow. Of course the area under irrigation will be doubled after completion of the Euphrates dam.

The Syrian Government pays considerable attention to water resources since a sound knowledge of the water balance is essential for the planning of agricultural development when the water resources are rather limited in comparison to the water requirements of the crops. About 60% of Syria has a rainfall of less than 250 mm where the evaporation reaches 2 500 mm per year. Therefore it is necessary to adopt wise measures and techniques for management and utilization of irrigation water.

Experimental farms have been established to find out the best irrigation methods, crop rotations and determination of crop water requirements.

In the past, because of the misuse of irrigation water coupled with the introduction of cotton, the salinity problem became apparent especially in the Euphrates and Khabour valleys and some parts of El Ghab. The problem is being aggravated year after year. This has led to the need for planning land reclamation on a large scale in the country. Such work is in hand at present and we have reached conclusions of value in the successful and economic utilization of these lands. A final plan is now being drawn up for an integrated irrigation and drainage system for all the Euphrates valley, having an area of 640 000 ha.

Horizontal expansion in the agricultural development of Syria, based on an increasing total area of irrigation, goes hand in hand with vertical expansion by applying modern techniques to crop management and using fertilizers according to scientific patterns; concerning the latter, a new policy has been established for fertilizing cotton, sugarbeet and wheat and there are also plans for improving soil properties.