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Report of the Second External Programme Review of the
International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)

(The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, Technical Advisory
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Misc. Information for Introduction

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Arability, Precipitation, and Crop Growing Seasons In WANA Region

The dry areas of West Asia and North Africa (WANA) consist of about 978 million hectares within the winter rainfall zone. 13% of the land is arable, and of that 13% 35 mil. ha are under irrigation, 93 mil ha are rainfed. The range of rainfed agric. land varies from year to year, but rarely exceeds @ 90 mil ha. 75% of the region is desert, some of it at high altitude; the remainder is naturally flooded and "waste-land." The climate is characterized by winter rainfall and hot dry summers. Rainfall is variable, ranging on av. from 100-600 mm/yr. Highest precipitation occurs in coastal areas with a steep decline as one moves away from the coast. Rainfall throughout the WANA region is erratic within and between years, causing enormous fluctuations in crop production. Within a given season distribution also varies with longitude. The length of crop growing season as determined by moisture and temperature varies between @ 70-100 days at high elevations and areas with rainfall <300 mm/yr; 140-210 in areas with > 400 mm/yr. About 126.5 mil. ha of land in WANA region have a growing season above 75 days/yr, of this 38% have less than 120 growing days. In WANA, irrigated agriculture is much more important in relation to local economies and production than dryland farming.

Food Demand in WANA Region

[The meaning of these climatic conditions is that] In WANA food imports typically constitute over 20% of total imports and represent almost 5% of GDP. WANA is the largest food deficit region in the world; food imports account for more than 40% of all food imports by the entire developing world. Coupled with slow growth in domestic product has been the rapid rise in food demand owing to lower real prices, higher incomes, and population growth and large flows of food aid from North America and Europe. Latter phenomenon has lowered real cost of imported food. At the same time, basic food prices have been heavily subsidized in many WANA countries encouraging

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domestic demand and sometimes depressing incentives for local producers. Overvalued exchange rates and protection for industrial sectors further discourage agricultural production and lead to more dependence on foreign imports.

Population Growth and Labor Force

The average population growth rate for WANA is 2.7%/yr with little sign of abatement. But there is a marked fall in the proportion of the labor force in agriculture. Rural to urban migration has depleted the agricultural labor force. Remaining landless workers and farmers migrate seasonally. The result is an increased demand for new farming techniques and equipment that are labor-saving and increased productivity of the remaining labor force which is increasingly female and elderly in some countries.