

THE PROBLEM OF FOOD IN JORDAN

by

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Food is one of the problems which Jordan faces at the present time. The rate of population growth in Jordan is very high (3.2%). From 1.2 million in 1952, the population rose to 2.5 million in 1973. This is due to a high birth rate (4.8%) combined with a declining death rate (1.6%), in addition to high fertility (6.8 infants per woman). The result is that the man-land ratio has been rising (4.7 dunums per a person), while per caput food production has decreased.

Food production and its sufficiency :

If one looks at the production of food and the per caput food production over the last ten years, he can realize the following facts :

1. The food production has decreased in Jordan, especially after June 1967. The seizure of the West Bank of Jordan by the Jews placed one-third of the total population under enemy occupation and deprived the country of half its economic resources. For the West Bank is an important producer of goods and services and constitutes a vital component of effective domestic demand. In 1966, the West Bank contributed about 45% of the gross national product of which the share of agriculture was 37%.

Although it comprises slightly over six percent of the country's total area, the West Bank contains one-fourth of the total cultivated area and produces 65% of Jordan's output of vegetables, 60% of fruits, over 80% of olives and about 30% of cereals.

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2. The oscillation of agricultural production generally and food production particularly because a large proportion of total agricultural output is derived from dry farming in areas subject to frequent droughts.
3. The rapid population growth has not prevented considerable and highly important improvement in per caput food supply.

Cereals, meat and milk were selected as samples of food to show the degree of their self-sufficiency and their changeable rates. Their ratios show that Jordan endures a remarkable deficiency in these basic foodstuffs. The oscillation of rainfall quantities is undoubtedly the dominant factor in the variation of the self-sufficiency degrees. Moreover, the drought is reflected on the decrease of agricultural and animal products inducing deficiency and high prices in these products. The rapid growth in imports of foodstuffs is a function of rapid development at the intermediate level of per capita income.

An estimation of the demand for food :

The increase in the demand for food can be attributed to two factors :

- a) The increase of the population.
- b) The increase of the per capita income.

These relationships can be expressed in the following formulae :

$$D = P + ng$$

where "D" is the annual increase rate in the demand for food, "P" is the annual population growth rate, "g" is the annual increase in per capita income, and "n" is the income elasticity of demand for food which ranges from 0,3 to 0,7 or 0,8.

Applying this equation to Jordan and some of the other developing Arab countries, and to some developed countries, it can be seen that the annual increase rate in the demand for food is about 6.5% in Jordan. This rate is somewhat high when compared with other Arab and developed countries.

The nutritional standards :

Nutritional standards are used to assess the adequacy of diets and of national food supplies. Generally, each person must take a daily meal containing carbohydrates, fats, proteins and vitamins. The energy requirements of individuals depend on variables inter-related in a complex way : physical activity, body size and composition, age, climate and other ecological factors.

The diet of most people in Jordan contains a reasonable variety of foods, but the quantitative intake of some desirable foods is somewhat low. The intakes of energy and protein are generally adequate. For the refugees and the inhabitants of the south of Jordan, these are somewhat lower than those of non-refugees.

The percentage of the nutrients supplied by the major food items show that bread, consumed in fairly large amounts, makes a major contribution to the nutrient intake. This food item contributes approximately 50% of the calories and for refugees it contributes 60%. All cereals, mostly bread, provide considerably more than 50% of the total protein intake. Proteins from animal sources supply approximately 24% of the total protein of diets for nonrefugees, but only 10% for refugees.

There are low levels of intake of vitamin A among all segments of the population. The presence of severe forms of malnutrition can be found among infants and young children (0 - 4 years of age). These severe forms of malnutrition include protein-calorie malnutrition (Kwashiorkor, marasmus) and anemias. Growth retardation in children is attributed in part to nutritional causes.

Solving the food problem :

The major objective of agricultural development is to increase food production to meet the increasing demands for foodstuffs. The three - year (1973 - 75) development plan of Jordan is an ambitious, well-prepared programme which could help bring about a quick recovery of the economy. The plan aims at creating at least 70,000 new jobs, expanding land utilization and irrigation in the Jordan Valley, the southern Ghor and the highland areas and improving production and marketing methods. The plan also aims at decreasing the import bill for agricultural products. A

number of measures would be put into effect during the plan period to expand and strengthen the agricultural cooperative movement, to organize a better relationship between landlords and tenants, and to develop an adequate extension service in all agricultural areas.

Jordan needs to continue its progress by designing successive development plans. The conservation of natural resources is vital work for increasing food production. Experimental research is also indispensable for getting new kinds of seeds which can give high yields.



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