

ANERA

NEWSLETTER

AMERICAN NEAR EAST REFUGEE AID

Number 78, April-June 1987

FARMING REALITIES: GRAPE GROWING IN THE WEST BANK

The image of farmers and the land they work often evokes a romantic scene — men and women working in harmony with nature, coaxing the soil to produce their food and livelihood. Generally, farmers are pictured leading a life of enviable simplicity. The real situation behind the image, however, is usually a more precarious relationship between farmer and land.

Traditionally, the insecurity of the farmer's situation derived from his limited control in two areas: natural calamities such as drought, flood, and pestilence on the one hand, and the farmer's tenuous access to machinery, fertilizers, water, and efficient cultivation techniques on the other. Today, modern innovations are providing farmers with more influence over all these factors affecting their crops.



IN MEMORY OF ELIZABETH NASIR

Dear Friends,

It is with deep sorrow that we announce to you the passing away of Elizabeth Nasir, the founder of Rawdat El-Zuhur, at the age of seventy-eight after a short illness. Her loving heart finally failed in the early hours of the morning of Thursday, April 2, 1987. The funeral took place the following day at the St. George Cathedral in Jerusalem, and she was laid to rest at the family cemetery in Birzeit.



The memory of Elizabeth Nasir's rich and fruitful life will always be a source of pride and inspiration to all of us at Rawdat El-Zuhur. May we be able to maintain the same spirit and standards that she has set for the school and keep the torch burning on.

Salwa Zananiri
Headmistress

Samia Khoury
President

The ANERA office received with sadness the above tribute to Miss Elizabeth Nasir from Rawdat El-Zuhur, an elementary school for poor children ANERA has assisted for many years. Many of you, who knew her as Lizzie, have been long time admirers of her valiant struggle on behalf of the children. We know you will miss her as we do.

THE GRAPE GROWER

Approximately 40% of the West Bank is cultivated. This *Newsletter* is about one group of people who make their living from this land: the grape farmers of the West Bank.

Considered solely for their dietary role, fresh and processed grapes play an important part in the local diet of West Bankers. However, grapes' impact on the people who cultivate them is even greater. Grown successfully, grapes are quite profitable: villagers in viticulture regions enjoy a higher standard of housing, for example, and are better able to undertake village improvements, such as potable water and sewage systems.

The grape grower's recent success reflects the general trend of rapid innovation currently engaging Palestinian farmers in the West Bank. New techniques of cultivation, such as *trellising*, have contributed to higher yields. Previously, farmers followed the Mediterranean practice of letting the vine grow along the ground. In trellising, farmers tie branches to wires stretched between stakes. Suspended, leaves and grapes enjoy improved air circulation, and fewer grapes succumb to rot.

A measure of success, however, has not eliminated insecurity from the grape grower's life. Currently, the growers face two major obstacles — the resurgence of a dreaded vine disease, and the problem of market bottlenecks during grape harvest. How they confront these problems exposes the inner reserves of resourcefulness and ingenuity with which Palestinian farmers combine knowledge, skills, and technology in solving serious difficulties.

REMEMBERING THE RAMALLAH INFESTATION

Farmers have not forgotten the devastating effects of the last outbreak of vine disease in the West Bank. In the Ramallah District, north of Jerusalem, the infestation destroyed regional grape production during the 1930's and early 1940's. The growers, powerless to arrest the disease's progress, were reduced to watching the vines waste away.

The Palestinian families were forced to leave Ramallah. Many made their way to the U.S., where today the greatest concentration of Ramallah expatriates reside.

It was not until the mid-fifties that the disease behind the destruction was identified. Today, viticulturists know that phylloxera, a small insect undetected by the naked eye, attacks and destroys root systems of vines, eventually destroying the entire vine. Adjacent soil is rapidly contaminated by the transmission of eggs and larvae by ploughs, animals, and human beings. There are no known pesticides for eradicating the insect: once established, phylloxera cannot be controlled.

In 1979, farmers in the southern West Bank districts of Bethlehem and Hebron discovered symptoms of leaf roll in several vineyards. Evidence of a new outbreak of phylloxera spread alarm throughout the region. Since the grape industry underlies the well being of entire villages, everyone, not just the farmers, worried whether Bethlehem and Hebron would lose its grape industry, as Ramallah had.

A group of concerned agricultural engineers and farmers formed an ad hoc committee to tackle the new infestation. They requested ANERA's assistance in bringing in a viticulturist to study the problem and make recommendations. His advice: uproot all existing vines in the threatened area, and replant new, phylloxera-resistant rootstock.

Changing the rootstock is a lengthy — and extremely costly — process which discourages farmers from attempting it even in the best of times. The costs of removing old vines and replanting with expensive new seedlings are often prohibitive. Moreover, after planting, three to four years pass before the farmer can harvest his or her first grapes. It takes several more years before the grower realizes a large enough crop to earn a net income.

MEETING THE CHALLENGE

The specter of a new phylloxera infestation has galvanized local institutions. With ANERA's assistance, the Hebron/Bethlehem Regional Plant Nursery Cooperative will soon offer grape seedlings grafted on phylloxera resistant root stock to farmers at a much more reasonable cost than currently available. Less expensive seedlings will offset some of the cost of this process. ANERA has established a revolving loan fund to help growers meet the expenses of completely replanting their vineyards.

With these measures, the grape growers of the Bethlehem and Hebron districts hope to avoid the fate of Ramallah's growers. While averting certain catastrophe, these efforts will also go a long way in addressing the second problem facing growers: deteriorating prices and markets for grapes.



West Bank nurseries experiment with new grape seedlings for farmers considering vine substitution.

Today, 80% of all grapes grown in the West Bank are of one variety, which matures between August 20 and September 30. As new methods improve yields, traditional market bottle-necks increase as too many grapes ripen at once. This lowers grape prices, and significantly reduces the farmer's income.

Unlike produce such as olives or almonds, grapes cannot be stored for an extended period of time while waiting for prices to improve. Moreover, the perishable nature of the produce prevents farmers from turning to alternative markets in Jordan and other Arab states.

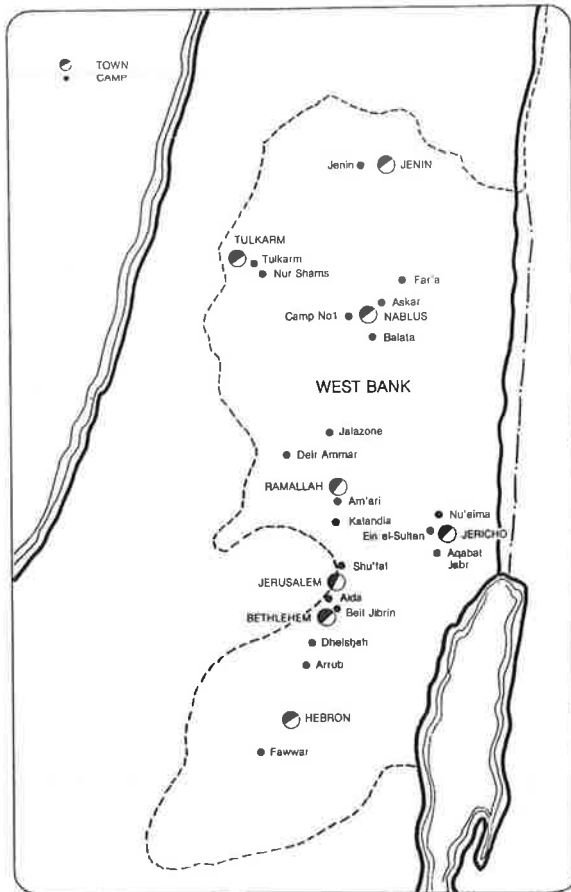
The solution to this problem is to stagger the timing when grapes ripen, substituting existing vines with varieties which mature at different dates. This would extend the grape harvest over a long period of time, reducing market glut and increasing the prices the grapes command.

Phylloxera is already stimulating the demand for disease resistant seedlings and revolving loan funds to finance their



This irrigation system waters individual plants at the rate of a dripping faucet. These networks eliminate the watering of surrounding soil and weeds.

planting. Once established, these projects can assist farmers in changing the grape varieties and stretching out the season.



The West Bank (UNRWA Field Map)

LOCAL INITIATIVE

Working with farmers and merchants, the West Bank municipality of Halhul has devised a plan to extend the marketing year by prolonging the life of the harvested grape. With ANERA's assistance, it will install a refrigeration unit, which is expected to extend the life of grapes from 5 to 12 months. By keeping produce fresh longer, merchants can better regulate the quantity offered for sale at the market, and ultimately, preserve higher prices for farmer and merchant alike.

In Hebron, ANERA works with a local group that has proposed converting surplus fruit into juice. Since juice doesn't need to be consumed right away, farmers unable to sell their grapes at the market can sell them for processing, and preserve their profits.

Blueprints for the proposed plant include provisions for adapting it for processing other regional fruits, such as plums and citrus. As an outgrowth of the grape farmer's problem, the juice plant promises benefits for farmers of other crops — in line with ANERA's commitment to projects with a wide-spread impact.

NEW PROBLEMS

Measured success in increasing the farmer's control over his economic livelihood has not eliminated the precariousness of his position. Whereas previously he was vulnerable to factors influencing his ability to produce, today the farmer's vulnerability has shifted to his ability to market improved yields.

As the efforts described above demonstrate, however, Palestinian farmers are meeting these new problems with determination and ingenuity. They are taking on the responsibility of making the slow, difficult transition to new varieties to halt the spread of phylloxera. To improve the marketability of their produce, they are improvising solutions which require the cooperation of many people of different backgrounds.

Despite harsh realities of farming, romantic images endure. Perhaps this is because the drama of real-life farming imbues the farming process with such romantic qualities as strength before formidable obstacles. In the wake of major transformations in how they farm, Palestinian farmers and their families are preparing to plant vines which will produce grapes into the next generation and beyond. At a time of renewed instability, this act takes on the symbolic force of affirming hope in the future.

ANERA has received special gifts ...

IN MEMORY OF:

Mrs. Adlah Abu-Akel ■ Daniel Alberts ■ Samuel Alberts ■ Ahisi Ashi ■ Marie Sawabini Barakat ■ Mary Caram ■ Anna Christy ■ Mr. and Mrs. Simon Y. Estfan ■ Stephen A. Haboush ■ A. S. and P. A. Harb ■ Edward and Billie Harris ■ Eva Hilger ■ Else Kappes ■ James M. Karoub ■ Parents of Nellie Krawetz ■ Anthony Craig Mansour ■ the Martins and the Mildons ■ William R. McIntyre ■ John M. Michaels ■ Walter Migotti ■ Rolland Joseph Morvant ■ Dr. S. Naify ■ Perry E. Nussbaum ■ Bill Obenaus ■ Alex Odeh ■ Palestinians who died of starvation in the refugee camps in Lebanon ■ Rosalie Greer Parker ■ Audrey Peterson ■ Pope Pius XII ■ Douglas Reed ■ Miss Claudia Rudloff ■ Gool Behram Rustomji ■ Elias and Julia Salamy ■ Magdalen Sweeney ■ Silas Wilsey

IN HONOR OF:

James Abourezk ■ The Birthday of Mr. Robin Barlow ■ Jesus Christ ■ The Birthday of Salvatore Contristano ■ The Birth of Antonia Costas ■ Dr. John Davis ■ Anthony G. Esposito ■ Miss Susan Fitzgerald ■ Dr. Peter Gubser ■ Mr. Robert Jones, Jr. ■ Frank Maria ■ Albert H. Najjar ■ The Nasir Family ■ Al Haj Abu Nuri ■ Palestinian Courage and Endurance ■ The Palestinian People ■ Ramadan ■ Samed ■ The Marriage of Mr. and Mrs. C. R. Smith ■ St. Bernadette Soubirous ■ The Birthday of Susan Thompson ■ Victims

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 for a child in East Jerusalem. (\$85 Minimum)
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This issue of the ANERA Newsletter was written by Tanya Lolonis, ANERA's Executive Assistant



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