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Trip Report

Syria - Turkey - United Kingdom
June 22, 1978 - July 12, 1978

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TRIP OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this trip were to: (1) make contact with ICARDA in Aleppo, Syria; (2) observe the state of the arts of range management in Syria; (3) observe interspersed rangelands in Turkey; and (4) make contact with the Wheat Research Center in Ankara.

SYRIA

In Syria Dr. Bolton, Dr. Jackson, Mr. Deutsch, and myself met with some of the ICARDA staff. We discussed the research centers facilities and objectives with Owen L. Brough, Assistant Director General and Harry S. Darling, Director General. We also met with the following research staff: John Doolette, Dave Gibbon and James Harvey in farming systems; M. C. Saxena and Rafiqul Islam in food legume improvement; Shawki Barghouti, training and communications; and D. Minehart, station development.

A present gap in the training of young men from North Africa and the Near and Middle East is the absence of range and livestock management. Dr. Shawki Barghouti was very interested in the possibility of O.S.U. giving a range management short course in the spring. Source of funds was not discussed; however, it was made clear that funding from O.S.U. probably would not be available.

The most fruitful days I spent were with Fiak Bahhady, research associate in the farming systems program. Fiak has spent a number of years working for the Ministry of Agriculture before coming to ICARDA. He attained some training in range management while attending Utah State University for two quarters. During a three day period in the field, I was able to observe and discuss range and livestock problems in Syria. The following discussion is a brief state of the art of range management in Syria.

Currently there are three major groups of people in Syria that own livestock. These are the villagers, semi-Bedouins and Bedouins. The villagers are generally located in the cultivated regions. These people rely on both the individual family plots for growing food and their livestock. In these wetter areas both sheep and goats are common. Villagers depend heavily on crop aftermath and intermingled rangelands to provide feed. They usually supplement their animals from four to five months out of the year.

The Semi-Bedouin people are generally located in villages where the cultivated lands join the Steppe. These people have intermarried with various Bedouin tribes. Some graze their animals near the villages all year round while others graze their bands far into the Steppe.

The Bedouins, although at one time strictly nomadic, are beginning to set up home bases. Much of the land around their homes is being cultivated and planted to barley, even though the government has made it unlawful to farm in the Steppe. Barley crops generally cannot be harvested due to low rainfall (200 mm annual average) so livestock are allowed to harvest it.

Nomadic herds, consisting of only sheep, graze deep into the Steppe from February through May, frequently traveling 300-400 kilometers. Initial growth of Steppe vegetation usually begins in February with rapid vegetative growth and flowering occurring in March and April. The growing season usually terminates in May. Once forage dries up and becomes unavailable the herds are moved into the agricultural areas - feeding on crop residues. Animals are frequently placed on cultivated lands immediately after harvest. The Bedouins are generally required to supplemental feed their livestock five months out of the year.

High inputs presently going into this system are: (1) expensive supplemental feed (i.e. barley, beet pulp, cottonseed cake, etc.), (2) leased cultivated lands where animals feed on crop residues or crops not productive enough to harvest, and (3) water-hauling eight months out of the year, twice a day during the dry season. Distances to water sources are highly variable, but one nomadic group observed was hauling water from the Euphrates--18 km. away. Water during the wetter months comes from cisterns.

Lamb crops are low (70-80%) varying with climate. A good operator can expect to receive about 300 lire/lamb and 75 lire for cheese from the ewe. The cost inputs per ewe are around 300 lire per ewe. With poor lamb crops and variable climatic conditions, it is difficult for these people to break even.

Many of the large owners break their herds up into flocks of 350 animals. They either pay a herder or a family member to take charge of the animals. Some attempt is presently being made to organize Bedouin tribes into cooperatives. It appeared little management or decision-making processes were being based on a cooperative organization. However, emergency feed for drought years is supplied to the defined cooperatives by the government at low interest rates.

Fiak Buhady has made some progress with the Bedouins. He has been able to protect some areas from grazing which are coming back into such perennial grasses as Stipa .sp. He has also planted some Atriplex species (one being Atriplex canescens) with some success. His major success has been getting the nomads to cooperate on some of these trials by not grazing their herds on these areas.

Poisonous plants tend to be a problem, in some years varying with weather. Livestock diseases often are transmitted from country to country in this region, frequently starting as far south as Sudan or as far east as Pakistan. Common problems are sheep pox, foot and mouth disease, inertoximia, foot rot and internal parasites.

While in the Steppe, I traveled with Dr. Robert F. Sullons, a veterinarian from the Animal Virus Research Institute, Pirbright, England. He felt disease and parasite problems of animals in these areas was largely due to poor nutrition, increasing animal susceptibility.

The state of range management in these countries is presently very low. Major emphasis on cereals and little emphasis on forage has created an imbalance in prices of high quality versus low quality food stuffs. Currently a kilo of grain costs the same as a kilo of straw. Although the standard of living is much lower in these countries, the price of lamb is about 170% higher than U.S. prices. There is a lack of trained personnel in the field of range management in Syria. Even trained scientists in the agriculture area have little concept of rangelands or range management. Most immediately think of intensively managed hay or legume pastures. One center has been set up in Syria to look at plants that may possibly revegetate Steppe areas, however little progress has been made. Although land of the Steppe is not as productive as arable land, it is an extremely important resource since it makes up such a large portion of the Near East countries. Range management as a science and as an applied tool is almost non-existent in Syria.

TURKEY

In contrast to Syria, Turkey was a much more highly developed country. State farms are currently carrying on breeding programs to upgrade farmers flocks. They are crossing marinos with fattails. The farms are presently attaining 132% lambing crop. Lambs go to market at 9 months of age, weighing approximately 45 kilograms. This was superior to results attained by local farmers.

There is little nomadic activity in Turkey. Many of the flocks are grazed around the villages. Most of the rangelands in Turkey lie in the eastern part of the country.

Although I had very limited exposure to the range program in Turkey, it appeared to have progressed little. I visited with Oserkurt, the deputy director of the Forage and Pasture Institute in Ankara. The current thrust in range has been to build some exclosures, and seed mixtures on overgrazed areas without any seedbed preparation - with little results. Not only is the lack of seedbed preparation a problem, but it appeared that species being seeded (i.e., alfalfa and sanffoin) were not suited for the area. For these two reasons, I felt the present range program was poorly organized and progressed little.

The Shotgun approach has been used in seeding such mixtures as crested wheatgrass, intermediate wheat grass, Fescue sp., alfalfa and sanffoin. The lack of range-trained personnel was apparent in Turkey.

ENGLAND

While in England I visited the Grassland Research Institute, however few of the personnel were available. I did observe some of their pastures near the station. I also visited Kew Gardens. This botanical garden is famous for its collections of plant species from all over the world.