

SOCIAL SOUNDNESS ANALYSIS: THE JORDAN VALLEY
FARMERS ASSOCIATION

by

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SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A brief preliminary study of the Jordan Valley East Bank population suggests that the people of tribal origin who have become landowners, early migrants who have purchased land, and the commissionjiiyah (agents who provide agricultural inputs at high interest rates and buy crops for marketing) constitute the upper strata of social and economic stratification with landless sharecroppers and wage farm laborers constituting the lower ranks. The membership and leadership of the JVFA is drawn primarily from the upper levels of social stratification. It is suggested that the JVFA must be prepared to offer its services to all people involved in cultivation if the stability and productivity of the Valley is to be preserved and developed. These services should include providing agricultural inputs in kind at low or no interest cost and developing a market facility in the Valley which will not only grade crops for domestic and foreign use, but also provide equal access to the market for both large and small crop producers. It is suggested that the present role of the commissionjiiyah should be carefully studied both to determine the extent of need for JVFA services and how these services might be designed.

At certain seasons in the agricultural year the Valley farmers already hire laborers at an hourly wage comparable to what they would receive as unskilled workers in Amman. There is reason to believe that as agro-business develops in the Valley a combination of mechanized

cultivation and periodic need for field labor will make this pattern of more importance in the future. Study needs to be made to determine what share of this work will be done by permanent Valley residents. Services need to be established which will help the Valley compete with growing urban employment opportunity which encourages migration from rural areas to the city.

The JVFA staff is both skilled and dedicated to its task. It must, however, take care not to promise more than it can deliver in a reasonable length of time. It may want to look for ways and means of providing regular commuting services between Amman and the Valley for its staff rather than waiting until conditions in the Valley permit them to reside there. Further research as well as the advice of experts must be a basis for JVFA planning. Suggestions are made for further research in the Valley which can determine if the assumptions and recommendations of this report are accurate and can provide quantitative information which will be of significance in planning for the JVFA.

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SOCIAL SOUNDNESS ANALYSIS: THE JORDAN VALLEY

FARMERS ASSOCIATION*

Introduction

The success of plans for the development of the East Bank Jordan Valley depend most decisively on the farmers who will live and work there. Without an active and enthusiastic farming community, the great expenditures of money for the East Ghor canal extension, sprinkler irrigation systems, roads, clinics, schools, and other infrastructural investments will not result in the highly desirable growth of agricultural production. The JVFA is thus an organization of key importance; it is an institutionalization of means whereby the interests of the farmers, in conjunction with those defined by Government representatives, can become the basis for important services to improve the life of the Valley farmer. The present Director of the JVFA is a highly respected, well-trained man already recorded the admiration which comes with success. The members of his staff seem capable and also enjoy good reputations. To use local terms, they are "clean" (nadhif) -- they do not accept bribes and are considered uncorrupted. This is

*This report is written for an American readership who, it is assumed, has some familiarity with the JVFA program through first hand experience or from reading the other reports, translations, and project proposals concerning the Association. Thus, I have not been overly concerned with Jordanian sensibilities nor have I provided very much background information for the uninformed.

extremely important for it means that attitudes toward the JVFA are not entirely cynical. If the Association can provide agricultural inputs at low credit for all cultivators, plus a market facility which raises the income of Valley cultivators, then it will be successful. On the other hand, if the JVFA does not move with all due speed to make good on the promises which it has made in radio broadcasts and public speeches, the skepticism already evidenced in the attitudes of Valley farmers toward the "itihād"¹ will deepen.

The JVFA needs to make the earning of a living as an agricultur-
alist in the Valley an attractive opportunity. Yet what the JVFA faces is a division in the Valley population between landholders and landless cultivators and between large farming and small farming enterprises. The same people may be at a disadvantage in both respects. They either lack land or enough income (or both) to save the yearly investment required for inputs or to do their own marketing. The JVFA membership and elected leadership comes largely from the more advantaged group. Nevertheless, the JVFA should provide services which will help both groups, and particularly the less advantaged.

Background: The East Bank Jordan Valley Population

A drive along the East Bank Valley road gives one the impression that the Valley population is healthy, relatively prosperous, and in some ways oriented to the standards of life in the cities of Jordan.

¹"Itihād" is a much used term in Middle Eastern political discourse and is usually translated as "Union." The English translation of the word as "Association" in the JVFA title is a bit misleading.

Why? Because the children are healthy. Because one does not see festering eye infections. Because women wear city clothes once considered suited only to the privacy of the home. Because no beggars are in evidence. Because men wear pants and shirts as good as those of the foreign visitor. The Valley people seen during an August visit simply were not poverty-stricken but rather in dress and personal appearance showed signs of well-being.

On the other hand, the village-type residential areas were much less well-developed than is customarily the case in well-established agricultural areas of the Middle East. Small one room dwellings, few courtyards, no guest rooms -- this seemed to be the common pattern in most areas. Just as the people seemed much better off than those agriculturalists of Egypt, Iraq, and Morocco which the writer knows, so did the investment in residential comfort seem far inferior. And there are few mosques and graveyards -- few evidences of any institutionalized commitment to village life. Of course this is in part due to the destruction of the 1967 war. But is it also because of fear of a new conflict and therefore a reluctance to make personal investments? In the case of several apparently prosperous farmers interviewed, sons were away working elsewhere rather than in the Valley assisting their fathers. Talk was of kinsmen in Amman -- or still living on the West Bank. Many men were said to be away. The citrus groves which were visited had guards, not farmers, in them; the owners did not live in the Valley.

These are a few of the impressions which have oriented this report around the assumption that at the present time, the Jordan Valley is not

a place to which most of its residents are tied by bonds of sentiment. They do not come from the Valley for the most part; they may not expect to die there. Perhaps additional research will prove this assumption unwarranted. However, a discussion of the Valley with anyone on the street of Amman will reveal that the Valley is considered a poor place to be, with an unhealthy climate, too far from the good life of the city, and too likely to be the scene of further conflict. Above all, it is not an integrated community of life-long residents who look to the Valley for the future prosperity of their off-spring and cherish the land as the home of their ancestors. It is a place to make money and a place for investments. These are extremely important factors to consider in planning programs for the residents. The implication is that the JVFA may have a more difficult task than would be the case were the Valley a native land to its inhabitants.

The people of the Jordan Valley are of heterogeneous origin. Statistical reports indicate that few resident adults were born and raised in the Valley; many are refugees of the 1967 war. Others are migrants from earlier periods. At the same time, large numbers of persons who lived in the Valley prior to the war are not living in refugee camps elsewhere. The Valley is also located in an area of the world which has exhibited extraordinary growth in urban population over the last decade; a good deal of this is due to migration from rural areas. Throughout much of the Middle East, salaried urban employment has come to be viewed as preferable to the uncertainties and perceived disadvantages of an agricultural subsistence. Thus, even granting local

destruction from the last conflict and the problems of rebuilding homes and communities, the appearance of the Jordan Valley does not suggest a strong, traditional commitment on the part of a large agricultural population. This is particularly true if one compares the Valley with other agricultural regions of the Middle East. The small towns of the Valley exhibit the greatest amount of activity and investment. But many of the residents of Shunah North, for instance, are not farmers. Indeed many of the farmers I met had second jobs with the government or with construction companies and were present in the Valley for that reason during the period (August, 1977) of low agricultural activity. Many other farmers were reported to be working outside the Valley for the summer months.

If the Jordan Valley is not native land for most of its inhabitants, if they lack the sentimental ties which might bind them to their traditional homes as the cradle of their ancestry and hope of their progeny, they are thus probably even more susceptible to concern over what the future may hold. Until peace comes to the region the lessons of the past will surely cause concern and make settlement a tentative commitment for many individuals. Even for the older residents of the East Bank a continued concern was to seek alternatives against future violent disruption of local life. Thus, among the older and most prosperous farmers with whom I spoke, I noted the absence of working age sons. The sons, I was told, were studying or working elsewhere in urban settings. Thus at least some farmers are paying for help rather than getting it from their sons -- an atypical arrangement in the Middle East.

In fact, the general impression gained from the brief period of study in the Valley on which this report is based, is that there may be a somewhat transient quality to life in the Valley. The demand for agricultural labor fluctuates during the year, with summer being the lowest point of farm activity. During periods of high demand, migrant wage labor is already a feature of the Valley economy, a point to be discussed below. At the present time, the pattern does not seem to be one of year around residence for many who are nonetheless part of the Valley labor force for part of each year.

The point which needs emphasis then is that the task of the JVFA is going to be one of helping to attract and hold a trained population of skilled agriculturalists in the Valley under comparatively adverse circumstances. Certainly the present commitments to developing the social services of the region and helping with the reconstruction of communities -- along with the extension of the Ghor canal and plans for land redistribution -- are positive steps in this regard. But the problem in the Jordan Valley is more difficult than in a region where ancient residence with complex social ties among the inhabitants makes departure for the individual less attractive. If the present trends continue in the Middle East, the Valley will have to compete successfully with urban job opportunities. The standard of living in the Valley must also compensate for a perceived lack of security. In this regard, those who have the least to lose by leaving, i.e., small farmers, sharecroppers, and renters, are the segment of the population most likely to seek employment elsewhere. An important task of the JVFA will be to insure

that those at the lower end of the income scale become an integrated part of the Valley population — or at least to orient its planning for the Valley in expectation of a high degree of seasonal labor fluctuation and a preference for increasing low-labor crops and mechanized cultivation on the part of the landowners. Indeed, seasonal inflows of wage farm labor and a high level of technologically advanced farming might be the most realistic view of the Valley in the next twenty years.

Social Ties in the Valley

Among traditional rural peoples of the Middle East, the existence of relations of kinship and territoriality is shown by every ethnographic study from the region. So important is this cultural pattern that Egypt, which has seen extensive, Government-planned, rural resettlement in the last twenty years, has generally followed the policy of moving whole villages or sections of villages into the new communities rather than individual families. Such ties are to be found in the East Jordan Valley. Though perhaps not in the traditional way described above, migrants from the same communities on the West Bank tend to settle together, thus maintaining their older relationships in a new setting. News about kinsmen still living in the West Bank or elsewhere passes swiftly among the Jordan Valley neighbors whenever someone makes a visit to the native West Bank community. Indeed, proximity to natal communities and the possibility of visiting there (however difficult this may be) is one of the attractions of the East Bank. In fact, the East Bank residents constitute a social link between kinsmen in Amman and those who remain on the West Bank.

Every meeting I witnessed between previously unacquainted Palestinians in the Valley involved establishing one's place of birth and questions about the possibility of friends, or better, kinsmen in common. Throughout the cities of the Middle East, this is a common experience and often a basis for decisions about urban residence and a means for seeking job opportunities. Among relocated people, developing networks based on traditional ties is a fundamental way of coping with changing social and economic circumstances. Thus any plans for community development, for the creation of local chapters of the Farmers' Association or for any other kind of social group necessary for the emergence of a stable and productive population should take this well-established tendency into account. A sense of trust among associates is an obvious advantage as a starting point in the development of new social institutions.

While those in the economically least-advantaged sector of the Valley population may be those most recent arrivals to the region (an assumption which needs further documentation) such people by no means constitute the whole of the Jordan Valley population. Most of the apparently prosperous farmers whom we encountered dated their residence in the Valley from well before 1967. Many of the men interviewed from the southern section were members of tribal organizations with long-standing, traditional associations with the area, stemming from conditions pre-dating the building of the East Ghor canal and the current programs of agricultural development.

Until the modern agricultural programs were initiated in the Jordan Valley, much of its territory was used for pastoral purposes rather than for cultivation. Tribal groups claimed sections of the Valley as part of their dirah (territorial right) and through most of the first half of this century the region was used for grazing during the winter months when early grass cover in December and January made the movement of herds in from the highland areas most attractive. The Valley was infested with malaria-carrying mosquitoes until their eradication after World War II. No major irrigation canals existed. Crops of grain could be grown in some areas where water from wadis could be controlled by traditional means and used for irrigation in the winter and spring. Apparently a few orchards and farms were irrigated by diesel pumps from the Jordan River and its tributaries. However, the heat of the summer and the lack of water for cultivation apparently made year-around occupation comparatively rare until recent times. Thus a now-dispersed group of Iranians of Bahai faith were able to establish a community in the northern region of the Valley without, apparently, threatening other East Bank interests. Thus it was tribal people with herds of goats, sheep, and camels who, in the past, considered the Valley as part of their domain and who could use it most effectively under traditional conditions.

Today tribal affiliation remains a matter of significance for a minority of individuals in the northern half of the Valley and for a majority in the southern region, especially around Shunah South.² How-

²By "tribal" is meant recognized descent traced through paternal ties which link individuals together in named, segmentally divided groups. Transjordan was a land of tribes and tribal descent and is often still a source of pride today.

ever, such tribes as the Adwan and the Ghazawi are not confined in number to the Valley but have many of their number in the cities and towns of the highlands. Why is a pattern of tribal-affiliation in the Valley of any significance? I believe there are several reasons that tribal affiliation remains important: If tribesmen still retain a sense of traditional rights in this region; to some degree, then, such membership may constitute a local claim to more prestige and higher status than that of migrants. The divisions among tribes may also constitute an important source of local factionalism. Finally, these tribes include among their number wealthy and influential persons in both the civil and military establishments of Jordan; they are an important force in the determination of national policies. Thus men with tribal affiliation who are members of the JVFA will have traditional loyalties and interests which on some issues may cut across and divide the membership. It is felt that they constitute something of an elite in the Valley as "true" Jordanians and as the original "owners" of the East Bank.

While the tribal populations in the Valley are said to have come primarily from the areas near Salt in the south, Ajlun in the central area and from Irbid in the north, in fact nomadic groups moved in and out of the area from much wider distances. Even now, sheep and goat herders from Saudi Arabia are among the tent dwellers whose animals graze on the stubble from harvested grain fields. In the 1940s only five percent of the Valley was under cultivation, and this area was primarily in the northern region where rainfall is heaviest. With the partial exception of that area, the tribes of Transjordan estab-

lished official title to most of the Valley during the cadastral surveys undertaken under British rule. Given the policy of providing first selection of land for redistribution to the existing owners, this traditional tribal population will remain of considerable importance as landowners when the extension of the Ghor canal is completed and the land is redistributed for cultivation.

However, it may be wondered if men of tribal origin will be equally active at the hard labor of cultivation. Tribal people of pastoral-nomadic background have moved more easily into jobs as mechanics and truck drivers. The Jordanian military has a strong tribal component. In the Valley such men will probably be active in using tractors and mechanical means of cultivation but will still seek others for the field labor which will be needed. It is not surprising that several Valley residents referred to tribal people as landowners and said the migrants were usually sharecroppers.

As elsewhere in the Middle East, tribalism in this region has included both segmental kinship-defined divisions among individuals of equal social standing and hierarchical relations between patron sections and clients of lower social status. Thus, near the Zarqa River is found a large settlement of black, tribally organized persons who refer to themselves as Adwan tribesmen, though they are said to have come from southern Egypt and the Sudan during Ottoman times. Yet, Adwani tribesmen of Arab origin referred to these people somewhat contemptuously as "our slaves." Of course, they are no one's slaves.³ However, they were

³They are also called "Ghorzi" or "depression people" -- a name they regard as insulting.

once under Adwani domination when tribal rule prevailed in the Valley and some of the social attitudes associated with slavery may prevail long after the legal system has outlawed such practice.

What are tribal attitudes towards West Bank migrants? What will be such attitudes when the program of land redistribution (which tribal groups opposed) is begun in the southern regions of the Valley? The development of agriculture in this region will mean the introduction of new people as residents in the southern region. How will they be received? Past and current attitudes must be considered for possible clues.

Desert oases in the possession of tribes in traditional Arabia were cultivated by tribal groups of inferior status to the noble pastoralists. Was this the pattern when the black population mentioned above were under the protection/domination of the Adwan? One official estimated that 40 percent of the land in the Valley is still owned by tribal landlords. Of course land has been sold and redistributed. Settlers from Palestine and the West Bank also own land. Circassians and Kurds, men of Syrian and Egyptian origins, also are part of the ethnic mix. But the impression remains that it is more recent migrants to the Valley who are regarded as the cultivators and who are, in the main, the less advantaged element in the local population.

The ethnic and cultural backgrounds of Valley landowners are not clear from the existing statistical data and it would be valuable to understand this situation more clearly. However, the fact that tribal leaders and/or wealthy men of tribal origin are predominant among the

elected representatives to the JVFA Council suggests the continuation of traditional patterns even under rapidly changing economic circumstances. Tribal maglis-s (councils which mediate disputes and arrange agreements) were observed in session during visits to the Valley. It is worth emphasizing once more that social research in the Valley be attentive to the persistence of the traditional forms of social status and prestige associated with tribalism for this may be of significance in understanding the position of West Bank migrants and other newcomers to the Valley setting. (Incidentally, it was said by some Jordanians in the Valley that West Bank settlers were "not trusted." It was not clear why but this attitude may relate to feelings of superiority on the part of older tribally related residents.)

Landholdings and Occupational Patterns

The statistical studies of the Valley reveal a wide range in the size of land holdings, but it is difficult to draw too many conclusions directly from such evidence. In the northern area irrigated by the present East Ghor canal, rentals and leasings of lands plus Government-authorized sales and sharecropping arrangements appear to have made important inroads on the patterns of family-owned and cultivated farms: this seems to have been the objective of those responsible for the land redistribution program. Clearly also, citrus orchards, which are common in the northern region, require less frequent attention than field crops and may be managed by individuals who live elsewhere and work at non-agricultural jobs. Thus landholding in the Valley involves a number of possibilities:

- (1) owners who reside locally and cultivate the land;
- (2) absentee owners who have leased or rented the land to cultivators or to other owners who supervise cultivation;
- (3) commuting owners who are in the Valley only for part of the year and who may hire migrant or under-employed local farmers during peak periods of work (as during the harvest of citrus fruits; and
- (4) resident owners who cultivate their own land and that of others through leasing or sharecropping arrangements.

Also, several of the officials working at Government offices are said to own land in the Valley. The impression gained from even a brief visit to the Valley is that there is great diversity in the relationship between land ownership and the cultivation of land. Certainly land-owning does not mean Valley residence.

As may be implied from the above classifications, land owning and cultivating land belonging to others are not exclusive categories. The same man may sharecrop, work as a seasonal agricultural laborer for others, work as an urban laborer or on construction jobs in the Valley during the summer months, and cultivate a holding of his own during part of the year. This is why it is misleading to think of work opportunities or ownership of land as categories of people: they are economic categories.⁴ The diversity of crops in the Valley plus both local and urban opportunities for wage labor makes different forms of participation in agricultural work but one set in a number of ways in which individuals may earn a living.

⁴Statistical information about work and land tenure can be misleading in this regard.

Twenty-five years ago, advocates of agrarian reform believed that landless cultivators, once given land, would become full-time farmers devoted to the development of the agricultural potential of their new possession. If such assumptions were then reasonable, conditions have made them much less so today. Rather, it seems that where residence is not a strictly enforced requirement associated with the possession of land, land often becomes a capital resource which, left to others to cultivate, provides a certain amount of income and security while permitting the owner to seek employment elsewhere. Cash income or shares of crops from farm land eases an individual's living expenses in the city and the city is often perceived as a setting in which one should live — for the sake of the benefits of one's children if not conclusively for one's self. Above all, perhaps, it is the uncertainty of farm income, subject at all times to climatic variations, changes in input costs, discriminatory marketing at the hands of profiting middlemen, and changes in government policy with respect to subsidies and import-export regulations which makes resident farming less attractive. This is particularly true in a period when new options are possible in the Middle East, such as the security of even a modest salaried job with subsidiary benefits.

While extension of the irrigation system and the development of schools and clinics in the Jordan Valley indicates a belief on the part of the JVFA that further development of the agricultural potential will contribute to the stability and size of the Valley population, this assumption needs careful qualification in the light of the above considerations. Already seasonal labor migration is a pattern in the Valley.

This needs further study. Will the new cycles of irrigation and crops planned for the Valley lend strength to the seasonal migration option? Landowners consistently reported that their relationship with a sharecropper was usually only for one year. Do the sharecroppers, as the owners reported, move on looking for better sharecropping arrangements? Or, do they leave to look for work in Amman? It would be sheer romanticism to think that the pleasures of tilling the soil will stop cultivators from moving if greater security and a better future is believed to be possible in the city. Hundreds of thousands of Middle Eastern farmers have come to this conclusion. The Jordan Valley will not prove to be an exception unless local income levels and living conditions are very attractive.

The Role and Functions of the JVFA

The JVFA recognized the complexity of the employment and ownership situation in the Valley when it established responsibility for decisions with respect to cultivation as a criterion for Association membership. However, the Association required a landowner to certify that the sharecropper is the decision maker, and this effectively determined that the overwhelming majority of the JVFA membership would be landowners since few landowners were willing to so certify. The reason for the reluctance of landowners to engage in such formal action was suggested by some officials to be a fear that sharecroppers might then be considered the landowners' employees and thus subject to labor laws which would result in legal and financial obligations on the part of the landowner. This may or may not be realistic but if such a concern has developed it

makes sense in one very important respect. The great majority of the land cultivated today in the Valley is not producing subsistence crops but rather cash crops — regardless of the fact that a certain amount may be consumed by the cultivator. Rather than a subsistence activity farming is a business in the Valley and promises to become even more so in the future. It is not unreasonable to presume that owners, absentee or resident, consider that it is they who are making the important decisions about the use of their land, even if a farmer-cultivator is in fact making day-to-day determinations about his work. Furthermore, it was said to be of concern that certifying the managerial responsibility of sharecroppers would provide a basis for claims in the advent of future land reforms. In any case, the JVFA is at the present time an association of owners and unless its organizational charter is changed, is likely to remain so.

Economic Patterns and JVFA Functions

To understand how the pattern of owner-membership in the JVFA may affect the ability of the JVFA to promote the well-being of the agricultural population in the Jordan Valley, one must examine the pattern which has developed there to meet the needs of the cash-farming, agro-business enterprise of the Valley. First of all, it must be recognized that the switch from grain crops to vegetables and citrus fruit has radical economic consequences for the position of cultivators, whether they are landowners or sharecroppers and renters. Such consequences are more favorable to large than to small farm enterprises. Means must be found to buy and use fertilizers and pesticides if good

crops are to be grown and the fertility of the land maintained. Timely marketing becomes a much more crucial problem. Unlike cereal crops, there can be no delay in getting fresh vegetables to the market lest the crops spoil. The Jordan Valley is too far from urban markets for small cultivators to make their way there individually as crops ripen. The lower income cultivators lack the necessary cash to purchase the necessary inputs or rent trucks for marketing in Amman. Those who are landless have no security for loans from the Agricultural Credit Union and apparently the Cooperatives which exist in the Valley are also not able to supply this group with the needed credit. While some farmers can borrow from urban relatives, this is far from a universal opportunity. A number of farmers, even those with land and apparent prosperity, complained that input costs at high interest rates were as great or greater in some seasons than what they realized from marketing their crops!

The COMMISSIONJIYAH

Given this situation, a significant division separates those Valley farmers who are able to provide for season input investments from those who cannot. Renters and sharecroppers are presumably predominant in the last group. Landowners with small plots of land and low income levels are also in a similar position. Thus, a large group of cultivators have come to depend on a group of men called commission-jiiyah who offer agricultural inputs at high interest rates (thirty percent, it is said) and provide the boxes for marketing crops at a rental rate which is also high. These men also gather the crops locally and market them, again, it is said, paying too little for pro-

duce from which they realize a significant profit, selling both in Jordanian cities and exporting the crops, for high prices, in oil-rich Persian Gulf states.

Who are the commissionjiiyah? Again, more research is needed to confirm and quantify information about this group. However, they were said to be both (a) Palestinians from the 1948 period of migration who live in Amman and travel regularly to the Valley; and (b) landowners from the Valley, including both wealthier men from among the early migrants, and landowners of tribal origin from Jordan. The development of this group of investors reflects the dissolution of traditional patterns of sharecropping. Credit and marketing has now become a free-floating service offered by these agents rather than part of the traditional contract between sharecroppers and landowners. This changing situation may explain some of the circumstances accounting for the reportedly short-term nature of sharecropping arrangements mentioned above. No longer will landowners regularly carry forward debts for their sharecroppers. Instead, the cultivator must pay, with interest, his share of input costs at the end of the season -- even if his creditor (commissionjiiyah) is also the landowner. In many cases, renters and sharecroppers must supply their own inputs by getting them on credit from commissionjiiyah who are not their landowners. Again, more research is needed to determine exactly what the dimensions of this problem may be. It is clear, however, that a new group of middlemen have developed whose services must now be paid for by many cultivators in addition to what they already have to pay for land rental. These middle-

men are an important element in the commercialization of agriculture in the Jordan Valley and have been essential to its development.

It is important to note that a number of commissionjiiyah are among the tribal landowners who were elected to the JVFA Council in the last election. This being the case, are we looking at a new relationship which has developed out of the older landlord-sharecropper pattern of the past? The market for the food crops of the Valley is excellent. Indeed the Valley cannot supply enough to meet both the foreign market demand and local urban needs as recent controversy over export policy illustrates.⁵ Yet the landless farmer remains at a disadvantage, unable to avoid high interest credit or sell profitably in the retail market. In traditional cereal cultivation, the large landowner could hold back grain from the market until prices were more favorable and the small farmer and sharecroppers had to sell as soon as the harvest was in to meet payment on debts to merchants. Does the commissionjiiyah function to the same end of taking advantage of marketing conditions which small farmers cannot profitably utilize, while charging interest rates the latter cannot avoid?

The distances to consumer markets, the high cost of inputs for intensive cultivation, and the deliberately created small landholding, an outcome of redistribution, has created a new opportunity to make money for those with the necessary skill and capital.

⁵ During the past summer the Jordanian Government was pushed by commissionjiiyah to permit the export of vegetables and urged by local interests to restrict export so as to provide a better supply for the urban Jordanian markets.

The commercialization of Valley agriculture required credit and marketing services and the contemporary growth of agricultural production in the Valley would not have been possible without the commissionjiiyah. As a flexible response to local needs, the services of the commissionjiiyah have involved risks of investment loss which no government agency was available to assume. The problem of providing a higher level of income for the poorer farmers will not be solved by doing away with the services the commissionjiiyah provides. Rather, their role needs careful study, for they offer necessary services on which agricultural activity depends. Attempts on the part of the JVFA to regulate or replace the commission-jiiyah must be arranged so that the needs of the farmers are fully met.

The plans of the JVFA call for providing the necessary agricultural inputs at low credit cost to the farmers while at the same time introducing marketing facilities in the Valley where crops can be graded and designated for local and foreign markets. It is necessary to look at both of these possibilities in the light of the above discussion.

Credit for Agro-inputs

In attempting to provide agricultural inputs on a more favorable basis, the recent first effort on the part of the JVFA (in mid-August) was a failure. Fertilizer was offered for sale on a cash basis, but farmers without money could not acquire it and those with money could buy it equally cheaply on the market. But even if the JVFA had been in a position to offer fertilizer on a credit basis and had made membership in the Association a necessary condition for its acquisition, the landless cultivators would still have been unable to benefit from this service. For, as we have seen, landowners form the great majority of JVFA membership.

The JVFA, then, must be in a position to offer credit in kind, as fertilizers, seeds and pesticides, to whoever presents himself as a farmer, whether or not he be a landowner. What is strongly suggested is that JVFA membership not be made a requirement for JVFA services in the Valley. Certification of the needs and prospects of the cultivator can be a responsibility of the agricultural extension agents in each of the thirty-three districts, once such agents are more fully on the job. Such agents are supposed to be JVFA representatives even though they will be employees of the Ministry of Agriculture. The agents will have to be well-acquainted with their districts if they are to be responsible for authorizing JVFA credit to Valley cultivators.

What must be avoided is the development of a situation in which landowners can benefit from JVFA credit while landless cultivators still pay high interest rates to private agents (as in now the case). Inasmuch as the policy in the JVFA charter for determining membership seems, in effect, to work against recruiting landless cultivators, the policy for offering credit will have to fill the gap by offering credit to non-members. If the JVFA cannot help the sharecropper provide his portion of the agricultural input costs at a low or no interest rate, then the inequity which now exists will continue in a new form. The fact that the JVFA Council is composed of men who apparently are profiting from the present situation will not make this task any easier, for they will seek to continue to profit with JVFA assistance.

In this same respect, the JVFA is going to have to be prepared to assume some of the risks involved in agricultural production by making the repayment for agricultural inputs it provides relate to the income

farmers receive for their crops. Do the high interest rates now charged by the commissionjiiyah reflect the fact that the returns from some of their investments turn out to be lower than expected because of poor crops or adverse market conditions? Some risk must be involved in their investment. The JVFA should assume some of the risk -- especially if it is to encourage new crops and new patterns of cultivation. Such innovations will be necessary where the new sprinkler irrigation systems are being installed. The JVFA will have to assume part of the risks and losses of innovation; holding a farmer to full repayment for the inputs he received on credit when the crops do not provide the expected level of income will quickly discourage those very cultivators whom they are trying to help and help foster whatever patterns of instability now characterize the situation of many cultivators in the Valley.

Marketing

Establishing local grading and marketing of crops by the JVFA should go hand in hand with the development of an inputs-on-credit service. A local market in the Valley would presumably be accessible to anyone in the Valley with crops for sale. Such a market should offer food crates and boxes at low rentals while grading and selling crops at prices which reflect the urban and foreign market prices. Such a market could presumably provide a better return for the small farmer and landless cultivator while at the same time reserving a new role for the commissionjiiyah with urban and foreign market customers (see below).

If the JVFA wishes to establish a marketing facility which will both provide a means of designating, through grading, crops for local markets and for foreign export and better returns for the smaller land-

holders and sharecroppers, the Association will have to anticipate getting into a relatively complex operation. Yet establishing a local market is probably the best way in which a more equitable distribution of income can be insured.

First, the market facility should establish a regular pick-up service during the harvest seasons. The new road in the Valley would make it possible for a truck to deliver market-owned (JVFA) empty boxes and pick up full ones along the road from one end of the Valley to the other in a comparatively short period of time. This would eliminate or (if a charge is made) lower the costs of crating crops and transporting them to markets. Such costs are presently among the factors which reduce small farmer income and factors over which they have little control.

Second, the Valley market should be principally for selling produce to wholesalers who can still make a fair profit by exporting the crops from the Valley and selling them in Jordanian cities or exporting appropriately graded crops abroad. Certifying where the crops are to go should be the task of market officials at the time of sale. Sale prices should be established by daily auction. Here is the new role for the commissionjiiyah: assuming the profitable responsibility of purchasing produce at the market and selling it elsewhere.

This new function for the commissionjiiyah should be given serious consideration and developed in consultation with the agents now in business in the Valley. Since the JVFA Council already includes men who are in this business (and who also own Valley land) and since this group is a sophisticated and well-established part of Jordanian society, the group clearly should be involved in planning for the JVFA market faci-

lity and functions. As far as is now understood, the JVFA does not plan to act as a marketing agency dealing directly with retailers in Amman, for instance, or with import agents in foreign countries. Surely this would provide a satisfactory and profit-making enterprise for the commissionjiiyah. The JVFA should be responsible for seeing that open bidding establishes a fair wholesale price in the Valley, and thereby insures local cultivators an equitable share of the retail price. If open bidding does not occur, and if competition does not develop among the commissionjiiyah-wholesalers, then attempts will have to be made to draw new agents into the marketing operation or perhaps some form of minimal wholesale pricing based on retail prices will have to be established. Study should be made of this operation elsewhere. (In Marrakesh, Morocco, for instance, farm produce is distributed to merchants through a daily auction at a central wholesale market.)

The impression received from discussion with JVFA officials was that the principal function of the market grading they envisioned establishing in the Valley was controlling the distribution of goods, permitting high grade produce to be exported and lesser grades sold in Jordanian markets. As suggested above, it seems necessary to consider this market in broader terms if raising incomes of poorer cultivators is a JVFA objective. By making the JVFA market the center of all distribution of Valley produce much can be accomplished in this regard, for it is currently the lack of direct access to markets and the expense of the middleman function, provided by the commissionjiiyah, which is the source of much of the problem. Large landholders can act as market

agents on their own behalf; small farmers cannot. Clearly, the JVFA could provide important services by equalizing market opportunities, insuring better control over the flow of crops to Jordanian and foreign markets. Through grading produce before it is auctioned, it could help establish a more uniform quality of market produce for the buyer.

The problem of relating the market function to the provision of input credit remains. This is an important issue because, as was argued above, repayment for inputs-on-credit should be related to the prices the farmer receives for the crops he produces. It may be necessary to establish an accounting system whereby the JVFA market officials can keep track of the payments made to each farmer for crops he sends to the market. What each farmer receives could then be balanced against his debt for inputs-on-credit. A determination could be made as to what proportion of income from market sale should be retained for repayment of input loans.

High food prices are now typical throughout most of the Middle East. Thus, if some of the marketing and grading problems stated above can be solved, Jordan Valley agriculture should be a profitable operation for all the people who cultivate, large and small farmers alike.

Wage Labor Migration

As the use of tractors and other machinery continues to increase the nature of cultivation in the Valley may intensify a pattern of high labor demand during harvesting seasons with a lesser need for workers during the remainder of the year. Here again it must be emphasized that a study of seasonal patterns of labor demands in the Valley is

essential and that serious consideration be given to this matter in planning the new agricultural areas to be opened in the central and southern regions of the Valley through the extension of the East Ghor canal.

At present Valley agricultural workers are reported to earn 500 fils (about \$1.50) per hour during harvest season (three months of the year). This is the same wage said to be common for unskilled labor in Amman. Thus we are not looking at wage levels established exclusively within an agricultural sector of the economy; as stated above, the work patterns of many Jordanians (and other Middle Easterners) now encompass both rural and urban employment.

Already Pakistani and Yemani pilgrims to Mecca are said to be spending time working in the Valley while on their trip. Last summer a landowner contracted with a group of Egyptian farmers for seasonal work. Wage labor on a temporary basis is an established fact in the Valley. Are these part-time cultivators to become a group of concern to the JVFA? Will the import of foreign labor lower wage levels for Valley residents? Should this not be a concern of the JVFA? At what standard should migrant workers be maintained? Should rules and regulations be established? One can foresee mounting pressure on the JVFA and the Jordanian Government to deal with these problems.

A sharp division of interest may be foreseen, with larger landlords favoring labor importation and small holders and landless cultivators opposing this practice. Unfortunately, difference in self-interest again divides the richer from the poorer farmers in the Valley.

Once again it will be difficult for the JVFA to include the poorer group as Association members. In fact, the more influential members of the JVFA are now demanding that the free flow of farm labor be continued. It would be well for the JVFA to establish some policy in this regard before the problems become more acute.

A related issue is also important. Currently a number of cultivators are spending a full year in the Valley by working on local construction gangs during the period of low agricultural activity. Study is needed to determine how many Valley families are involved in seasonal or part-time construction work and what the effect of its completion may be on the local economy. As long as high levels of urban and local construction work continue in the Valley this labor complements seasonal high wage farm employment. Unlike the situation in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, however, low income migrants may not be found near by to supply temporary labor needs unless Egypt could become a regular source of farm workers. If the Jordan Valley continues to develop agriculturally in such fashion as to create yearly peaks and depressions of labor needs, the Valley will develop in a quite different way than may now be envisioned; it will certainly not be a region of small family farms no matter how the land is redistributed. If its resident population is unable to meet its own farm labor needs, how will they be met? This problem needs serious consideration.

Services for Valley Cultivators

Given the rising levels of urban employment in the Middle East and the opportunities perceived as reserved for educated persons, the

desire to obtain an education for one's children appears to be a growing concern among Middle Eastern people generally. The Valley people are no exception; in fact, they are probably more concerned because of their uncertainty over the future peace of the region and the felt need to establish an alternative urban base. Providing new schools at all levels for the Valley children will be a stabilizing contribution of the utmost importance. A policy has already been established and new schools are being built. If the Government will see that teachers who are of top quality are sufficiently well paid or otherwise rewarded for going to the Valley, it will have contributed importantly to the overall success of the area's development plans for the area.

The possibilities of adult education should also be considered. Elsewhere in the Middle East, evening courses in literacy and arithmetic have been well attended, both in rural areas and in the cities. The Jordan Valley farmers are businessmen. Part of the disadvantage which keeps the poor cultivator poor is the inability to read forms and write applications. He is at the mercy of busy officials. Illiteracy will be a big obstacle to replacing oral with written contracts for sharecropping, as some officials have mentioned. The JVFA might well consider the need for such classes and could do a great deal for its own reputation by sponsoring them throughout the Valley at existing Government buildings after work hours.

Finally, the JVFA may want to investigate the need to provide additional training in the use of modern chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Are these currently being used to the best advantage, or are

they being over-used as has been shown to be common elsewhere? Is the present Ministry of Agriculture program already sufficient? Such instruction might be associated with the programs being developed to train farmers in the use of the new sprinkler irrigation systems.

The Social Position of the JVFA

The JVFA clearly has promised too much too soon. One official commented that it might be five years before input-credit and marketing programs were fully underway. Lack of the necessary infrastructure in terms of housing, educational and medical facilities, and office space for employees in the Valley is part of the problem. However, the JVFA is also in a competitive labor market for its own staffing. The opportunities to make money in the private sector, to find grants for more education abroad, or move to a better job in the Government -- all these possibilities will tempt even those now in the incomplete JVFA staff. The JVFA Director is a Christian and has attracted several Christians to executive positions on his staff. Little or no Christian population is found in the Valley and perhaps there is grounds for some concern in this regard. However this also illustrates the fact that employees are attracted to bosses whom they feel they can trust, whatever the ethnic or otherwise traditional grounds may be. Both to support the morale of the JVFA staff and to make more reasonable expectations in the Valley, an effort should be made to avoid extravagant promises through the media and provide a more realistic picture of what can be expected when. At the same time, the AID program must consider what is likely to happen if the present JVFA Director moves to a posi-

tion of greater importance in the Government (as some Jordanians said he is likely to do).

The field representatives for the JVFA are going to be the thirty-three (Muslim) extension agents now employed in the thirty-three districts of the Valley by the Ministry of Agriculture. How eager are they going to be to accept new responsibilities for the JVFA? What plans are there to reward them for their services? They are already criticized for not spending enough time in their districts. If they are to be given more work to do, either the JVFA must find a way to reward them with direct pay or some form of subsidiary benefits -- or the agents will find ways to be paid by their clients. Again, it is likely that the poor, less influential farmer would be at the greatest disadvantage in this situation.

Finally, the JVFA might look to the Valley for new employees. Men with college educations are said to be farming there. Perhaps they would not agree to give up that occupation. However, if local residents could be hired for JVFA jobs at all levels of service, relations with the Valley residents might well improve. If some of these employees also manage farms, it will be no more than is common now among some Government employees in the Valley, whatever the official policy may be. This is not to infer a lack of skill or dedication on the part of the present staff but rather to point to a lack of social integration with the Valley population.

If, as seems likely, the membership of the JVFA is going to remain primarily that of farm owners, then renters, sharecroppers, and

seasonal wage laborers are going to remain largely outside the organization even though these are the least advantaged sector of the Valley population and the sector which will play a crucial role in the future productivity of the region. Furthermore, the last election to the JVFA Council resulted in the selection of traditional leaders, i.e., tribal sheiks and large landholders. Thus the Government appointees to the Council (which with the elected farmer representatives complete its membership) will have to speak for the agricultural sector of the population which will remain outside JVFA ranks. Only in such fashion can the JVFA develop policies through its Council which adequately reflect both the more advantaged and the less advantaged elements in the Valley population. Perhaps the policies of the JVFA are already a foregone conclusion. Perhaps the Council in practice will not be of crucial importance in their formation. At the present time, however, the Council reflects the established Valley interests of those who are already relatively prosperous.

Finally, it is the expressed intention of the present JVFA Director that eventually the JVFA staff will be fully located in the Jordan Valley. These men will have to leave their families in Amman until local facilities -- schools, hospitals and the like -- are more fully developed. Even so, the summers in the Valley are extremely humid and hot, and universal air-conditioning is a long way from realization. This summer climate also contributes to the seasonal movement of population described above. Work in Amman is far more comfortable in summer months than work in the Valley. Those who believe that a cycle of

intensive cultivation involving three crops a year will be possible for the Valley should spend a few weeks there in the middle of the summer months when temperatures average over 100° F. But so far as the JVFA executive staff is concerned, is full-time Valley residence realistic? Might not a bus, regularly commuting between staff headquarters in Amman and offices in the Valley, be a better solution which would also improve and sustain staff morale? Government housing for the staff might provide temporary quarters for certain periods or on a rotating basis throughout the year. But it will be some time before year around residence in the Valley will be regarded as other than a severe hardship; it is better to let that time come as a matter of free choice on the part of the staff.

Conclusion

The JVFA can be an important institutional means to improve the lot of Jordan Valley cultivators through providing equal access to low cost input credit and better marketing facilities. However, there is evidence of a pattern of social stratification in the Valley and JVFA membership is drawn primarily from the upper levels of the social hierarchy. This may be a major problem in providing greater equity among Valley cultivators. Several means of coping with this problem have been suggested. Much more study is needed if the growth of a stable, resident Valley population is to be encouraged.

There is, however, some reason to believe that the increase of cash cropping and dependence on machinery may create greater and

greater fluctuation in the yearly cycle of labor demands. The JVFA may wish to include this development in its plans for service to the Valley. Above all, the Valley is not now an isolated agricultural region and will become even less so in the future. It is part of a national and international economic scene in which urban employment plays an important role and competes with rural opportunities. The JVFA will have to help generate favorable rewards for work in the Valley if its residents are to remain there. It may also want to consider the needs of other farm workers who will come and go each year.

In fact, resident, year-round family farming on family-sized plots does not appear to be the likely future of the East Bank. While redistribution will create more owners, those owners will not necessarily be residents. It seems likely that both machines and migrant farm workers from Jordanian cities and elsewhere may supply much of the needed labor.

The Jordan Valley agricultural scene, then, reflects a pattern of change found in many areas of the world where traditional subsistence patterns have been disrupted or altered by political and economic circumstances, and are evolving into new forms. The Jordan Valley Farmers' Association is in an important position to deal with the problems posed by these developments. If some of the issues raised above are dealt with successfully, the JVFA may make an important contribution to the growth of agriculture in the Jordan Valley.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RESEARCH
IN THE EAST BANK, JORDAN VALLEY

(1) It is clear that a descriptive account of the pattern of cultivation and the social activities associated with it in the Valley needs to be developed over a full year's time so that variations can be directly observed rather than inferred. A number of suggestions as to the nature of social and economic stratification in the Valley await confirmation through a much deeper knowledge than could be acquired in ten days.

I would like to suggest that a year's study in the Valley by a social anthropologist or sociologist would provide a far richer data base for the development of JVFA policies than surveys or questionnaires. An inexpensive and highly motivated Ph.D. candidate with need for dissertation research would make an excellent person to undertake such a study.

(2) The work of the commissionjiiyah needs further investigation. A more detailed analysis of the way he works in the Valley and in urban markets will provide a more specific basis for designing services planned by the JVFA. A study of commissionjiiyahs, their work and their clientele is the best empirical basis for planning such services as part of the JVFA function.

(3) Special investigations should be made of the fluctuation of labor demand in the Valley and the degree to which labor migration is a factor in the local economy. Understanding where the migrants come from, how they are employed during other times of the year, and how they are used in the Valley will be necessary if future problems are to be anticipated in this regard and adequate social provision made for the people involved.

(4) Some attempt should be made to look at existing markets in the Middle East whose functions may approximate those suggested for the JVFA market in the Jordan Valley. It is important that a formal plan for the market not be derived from models developed in a non-Middle Eastern cultural context. The market must be based on the specific nature of the Jordan Valley situation and this should be an object of study before plans for the market are completed.