

The loss of the Maritime and northern plains in 1948 deprived the Palestinians from the bulk of their fertile lands and pushed their dispossessed peasants into the arid highlands of the West Bank. Yet even in the confines of that segment of the country is contained all the ecological variations of historic Palestine, though obviously in vastly reduced proportions. This can be illustrated in the following agricultural inventory of the West Bank (based on Sh. Dajani, 1980:4-6) which divides the region into four distinct ecological zones, in descending order of land size:

- (a) The highlands: cover about 50% (about 2.7 million dunums) of the total surface area of the West Bank, most of which is sparsely cultivated land. The nature of the terrain and the limited rainfall it receives (c. 300-600mm. per annum) makes this area ideal for arboriculture. The main crops here are olives and grapes, and - to a lesser degree - fruit trees such as apples and almonds. A variety of subsistence crops are planted throughout this zone to supplement the farmers' cash income. Winter grains, especially wheat, are cropped in the small valleys and plains of the Nablus district.
- (b) The Eastern Slopes: this arid and dry zone occupies about 1.3 million dunums (about one-fourth the total surface area of the West Bank) and receives very little rainfall (c. 250mm. per annum). Because of continual soil erosion and the poor quality of its soil, it can only be used as pastureland, and (potentially) for fodder crops. Limited forestation projects, started during Jordanian rule, have been halted after Israeli occupation.
- (c) The Jordan Valley Basin: the ghor farmland, as this area is known, is potentially the richest agricultural area in the West Bank. It constitutes 0.84 million dunums (15% of the surface area) of which