

small farmer. Under the emergent conditions of commercial farming, the majority of Valley peasants were being submerged into unbearable debt to their landlord-commission agents; (b) salinity of soil and the primitive techniques of irrigation utilized under furrow canals, reduced the productivity beyond the self-exploitation capacity of the average peasant household; (c) demographic pressures on owned, and the limited access to sharecropped, plots decreased the average cultivated area for each peasant household; and (d) the confiscation and fencing-off of village lands by the Israeli army further reduced the economic viability of the village.

By the mid-seventies, an increasing number of local farmers were beginning to seek work in the neighbouring Israeli settlements of Argaman, Masua' and further south in Pesa'el, and a number of them had neglected their farmland completely. It was at this point that the adaptation of Valley farmers to capital intensive technology - sometimes individually, but mostly in collaboration with absentee landlords - succeeded not only in reversing this trend, but also in creating a new situation of acute shortage of labour, particularly during the harvest period.

Incipient proletarianization and farm negligence was thus halted through a substantial increase in crop yields which used to be obtained from primitive techniques of irrigation. The consequent betterment in the farmers' material conditions (between five to ten times their former income per dunum of cultivation) allowed peasants in the area to accumulate a surplus of disposable income, probably for the first time in their lives.

In villages like Zbeidat, but not in others, the farmer was able to use the disposable income to confront his usurious dependency on commission agents, since he no longer needed them for advanced credit and