

rise in the number of very small holdings (less than 10 dunams). This points to one of the fundamental problems relating to land use, namely excessive fragmentation into ever smaller plots. The primary cause for this phenomenon lies in the verbatim promulgation of Islamic injunctions which call for equitable distribution of inheritance among all heirs. Another factor, though much less important in relation to cultivated land, is occasional parcelling of larger holdings for purposes of land speculation.

The division of nearly all parcels in one holding among eligible heirs has led to extensive dispersion of fragments in the same holding, which are often separated by long distances. Although there is no statistical evidence on the intensity of this problem on the West Bank, but counting on data available for the East Bank where inheritance laws are the same, the problem is certainly severe. For the East Bank as a whole, the overall average number of fragments per holding was estimated in 1975 at 2.3.¹

The number of holdings showed a decline of 10 percent during the period of 1953-67, and 5 percent in the succeeding interval of 1965-67. The results in Table (II-9) indicate that while there have been slight increases in the number of holdings in Hebron and Nablus, the situation in Jerusalem district recorded a sharp decline. This may be explained in part by massive emigration of local residents from the Jericho area during and after the June War of 1967.

¹ Mazur, *op cit*, p 154 (calculated from 1975 agricultural census).

Table (II - 9)

Number and distribution of holdings in 1965 and 1967

	1965	1967
Total (including Jerusalem)	55,078	52,064
Hebron	9,815	9,887
Jerusalem (incl. Bethlehem and Jericho)	18,319	14,923
Nablus (incl. Tulkarm and Jenin)	26,944	27,254

Source: 1. IDF Census, *op cit*, Publication No 2, p 18, XII

2. Population and Employment in Agriculture 1967, *op cit*.

Continuous division of land through inheritance has not only resulted in excessive fragmentation of holdings but also in the dispersion of tiny plots in the same holding over long distances. This has precipitated serious problems and constraints in the process of agricultural development, notably the following:

1. It reduces holdings to sizes which are too small to provide sufficient income for the farm family. This weakens the heirs' incentives to develop their farms and paves the way for many of them to desert their land and change profession.
2. The mechanization of farming operations is rendered increasingly difficult, both for technical and financial reasons.
3. The proliferation in the number of disinterested land owners creates additional problems of communication for auxiliary infrastructures such as agricultural extension, credit, and marketing institutions.
4. The dispersion of plots in a holding over a wide area adds to the difficulty and cost of reaching them and reinforces the lack of interest among owners in attempting commercial patterns of farming.