

Women's share in agricultural labour, though difficult to quantify, is much more important than is indicated in official data. Technicians and officials who were interviewed in the course of this study have estimated women's share in the aggregate labour supply which is mobilized in agriculture at about 75%, as compared with only 20% in Jordan and 3.9% in Israel.¹ A similar proportion as that reported above was calculated from the responses of farmers who were sampled in this study. Furthermore, it was indicated by both groups (technicians and farmers) that about two thirds of female labour input is contributed by members of farm families on a seasonal basis. This explains the difficulty of accounting for female labour in official data.

Employment in Agriculture

Employment in agriculture has declined steadily and substantially during the occupation era. Counting on the basis of several conjectural estimates, it is believed that shortly before occupation, agriculture employed some 37-40% of West Bank labour. Admittedly, there was a slow but steady drop in agricultural labour since the 1961 Census which then estimated agricultural employment in Jordan at 40%,² and it could have been higher for the West Bank alone.

The situation of agricultural employment started to change rapidly as of 1969 when West Bank labourers were permitted to seek employment inside Israel. The number of agricultural labourers (excluding those working in Israel's agriculture) reportedly declined by 41% during the period of 1969-79 (see Table II-20)

1. Statistical Abstract of Israel 1980, *op cit*, p 316.
2. Lower estimates reported in the IDF Census of 1967 are due to the exclusion of the large number of labourers who emigrated during the War and shortly after. For many reasons, emigration from rural areas was more pronounced.

Put differently, the percentage of workers employed in agriculture relative to total employed labourers has dropped from 49 to 29.1 percent.

Table (II - 20)

Secular trends in agricultural employment

Year	Total employed	Employed in agriculture*	
	(000)	Number (000)	Percent of all employed
1969	109.9	49.0	44.6
1971	116.8	36.7	31.7
1973	126.4	30.0	23.8
1975	132.3	31.8	24.0
1977	127.4	30.7	24.1
1979	132.8	29.1	21.9

* This includes only those employed in West Bank agriculture. The number of workers and their percentage were computed from data provided in the original reference.

Sources: Statistical Abstract of Israel 1980, p 696 and 1970, p 633.

Labour mobility out of agriculture is underlied by a number of dynamic factors which were set in motion by the advent of occupation. This not only curtailed the number of hired workers in agriculture but it also forced out of it an increasing number of peasant farmers. According to official data, the number of farmers leaving agriculture during 1970-74 was more than four times larger than the decline in hired labourers.¹

The crux of the problem lies in the sharply declining profitability of most patterns of farming, which in turn is attributed to complex variations that have boosted production costs without inducing

1. Computed from Table G, in West Bank Agriculture 1973, (Ramallah Directorate of Research and Extension, publication no 147), p 9.