

There are other important secondary returns of olive culture. Non-edible oil residues are used by most producers in making good quality soap. It is customary to "cook" the family's year supply of soap following the completion of pressing operations. Incidentally, it should be pointed out that the soap industry of Nablus, which was once a major consumer of inferior quality oil, has replaced olive oil with cheaper imported oils. Regaining this market, though quite unlikely at the present, could help markedly expand the demand potential for olive oil.

Olive wood resulting from pruning operations is extensively used as a fuel in rural communities. With the sharp rise in the cost of petrol, olive wood meets a badly felt need. In southern districts thick olive wood is in strong demand by producers of wooden religious artifacts. Olive oil pulp, remaining after oil extraction, is also used widely as a fuel and could possibly be used in manufacturing feed mixes. Much of it is used again for oil extraction by solvent methods, producing about 6 percent of industrial quality oil.

In addition to the above-mentioned direct forms of return, olive production entails two other profound advantages. Firstly, it should be emphasized that olives are grown mostly on land in Class III and IV, most of which, by definition, is not fit for other forms of agriculture (except grazing). Secondly, olive culture draws on forms of labour which have very low opportunity cost, such as old family members, women, children and the spare time of owners. Consequently, it could be argued that olives use with reasonable efficiency substantial quantities of land and labour inputs, and at little or no expense to other patterns of farming.

Consumption and exports

Olives are consumed as pickles or pressed for oil. It is estimated that 85% of the olive crop goes into oil extraction and the rest is pickled (usually about 6,000 tons). Olive oil, and to a lesser extent olive pickles, are two important staple foods in the West Bank.

Domestic consumption of olive oil is estimated at about 8,000 tons per year i.e. roughly the equivalent of 30,000 tons of olive fruits. Locally produced oil is handled mostly in tins of 17 kilograms each. Consumption habits vary widely from urban to rural communities. According to a recent study, per capita consumption in large towns ranges from 2 to 4 kilograms per annum, whereas it reaches over 15 kgs in small villages.¹

The lower olive oil consumption in urban areas is attributed to their extensive use of other types of oil (mostly seed oils) and samneh - a local brand of cooking margarine. The trend toward partial substitution of olive oil with seed oils is gaining increasing ground even in rural communities themselves, mainly because of price difference. This is a very important point to consider when evaluating the future prospects of olive culture.

With local demand for olives (oil and pickles) in the range of 34 - 38 thousand tons, and in view of available production figures, it is clear that much of the olive crop is consumed in the West Bank itself. Occasionally there may be deficits which

1. S Nasser, Palestine Olives, (West Bank: Birzeit University, 1979, p 28).