

Olive are grown mainly on marginal land in classes III and IV. Although most old orchards were neatly terraced a long time ago, new plantations are currently preceded by only minimal land development practices, obviously because of exorbitant cost of land development.

New orchards require light pruning and occasional ploughing, once or twice a year, mainly to eliminate weeds. Although they manage to survive through the baking sun of long rainless summers, newly planted seedlings can grow much faster if they are irrigated two or three times during the summer months for 2-4 years after they are planted. Nearby cisterns can play an important role in this regard.

Mature orchards receive very different levels of husbandry. Ploughing is considered by most farmers and conventional technicians as the backbone of cultural practices. Due to a notably rough topography, ploughing is done almost entirely by animals. A minimum of two ploughings is recommended by extension agents, mainly to eliminate weeds and preserve soil moisture. However, due to the very high cost of ploughing it is estimated that about one third of olive growers plough their orchards only once a year.¹ The possibility of replacing one or two ploughings with chemical weed killers, as we shall see later, offers a great potential for reducing ploughing costs.

Fertilization and manuring of olive orchards is rarely practiced.

1. S Nasser, *op cit*, p 39.

A recent study has revealed that only 14 percent of farmers add manure and chemical fertilizers to their orchards. And despite strong (though inadequately tested) extension recommendations advocating excessive fertilizer use, it was found that 76 percent of olive growers did not even believe that fertilization is useful.¹ The researcher has encountered enough empirical evidence to justify farmers' reservations.

Manuring, on the other hand, is recognized as very useful by farmers and extension agents. But due to its rising cost (mainly the cost of hauling it to distant locations), its use has sharply declined.

Pruning of olive trees is considered by technicians and farmers as the most important single practice needed by olives, especially in older orchards. Annual corrective pruning, usually quite mild, is done by owners during the picking season. But there is an urgent need for wide-scale rejuvenation pruning in many growing areas, particularly in northern districts.

Insect and disease control is not practiced, despite the incidence of many pests. This point will be elaborated further under the section on production problems.

The picking season starts in October and extends for 2-3 months. Because of the small size of the fruit, olive picking is an extremely labour-intensive operation. About two thirds of olive growers pick their orchards themselves. This is usually performed

1. *Ibid*, p 41.