

In 1981 the difference was even much more pronounced.

Plum trees are accorded a relatively advanced level of cultural practice, comparable to that of grapes. The main problem which faces producers, other than price, is pest damage.

Plum trees are susceptible to stem borers and root rot (Armillaria mellea). The extent of damage, however, is much lower than similar hazards on almonds, figs, or apricots.

Expanding plum culture is certainly desirable but there are important prerequisites. More varieties should be introduced, with emphasis on early and late maturing ones. Pricing should be stabilized through cooperative organisations which should bargain for better prices in Israeli and Jordanian markets. The establishment of processing outfits which are able to absorb part of the surplus produce would be a great step forward. This, however, is not an unqualified proposal to establish a processing factory, since that requires a more elaborate study.

## 2. Figs

The total area is estimated (1980) at 2871 donums, as compared to 25,822 donums in 1966. Similarly, production is reported to have dropped during the same period from 13,855 to 11,000 (tons).<sup>1</sup>

The fig tree was until two decades ago a major tree in such areas as Ramallah and Nablus districts. Most of the fig produce was sold fresh, and the rest was processed into a local dessert called Kottain (dried figs). In certain parts

1. For 1966 figures: Agricultural Atlas of Jordan, op cit, p 112.

of Ramallah district figs were until three decades ago almost as significant as olives, whether in terms of area or importance in the local economy.

Fig production commenced a steady decline in the Middle sixties following widespread infestation with two very serious insects, namely, the stem borer (Batocera rufonaculata) and fig scaly insect (Ceroplastes rusci). As common with all rainfed fruit trees, no control measures were practiced, although the latter insect is fairly easy to control. The main problem was the lack of equipment and expertise. Infestation with fig scales spread steadily until it now covers over 90 percent of all West Bank figs. But fortunately, the trees themselves die at a slow rate and before death they can be easily rejuvenated with the proper remedial measures.

Profitability of figs is not easy to ascertain, due to their widespread inter-farming with other types of trees. According to the Department of Agriculture, net returns per donum are estimated at JD 15.9.<sup>1</sup> It is emphasized, however, that returns could be more than doubled if productivity is increased by providing better care for existing orchards.

Fig fruits are soft, which makes them excessively perishable under improper transportation and storage. With the problems of marketing across the frontier bridges so complex and time-consuming as they are, exports to Amman offer little potential should there be a surplus. Israeli markets, on the other hand, are able to absorb all fig surpluses and at attractive prices.

1. The Economics of Common Farming Enterprises, op cit, p 9.