

EXTRAORDINARY FARM DIVERSITY

Mediterranean farmers share an age-old heritage and specific climatic and geographical conditions, of which drought, sunlight and rugged relief are the primary features.

HISTORY

The first farmers emerged in the Neolithic (or Polished Stone) Age (10 000 B.C.) in several regions of the world: the near East, China, Mexico, the Andes and the eastern United States. In the Mediterranean region, the “Fertile Crescent”, which stretches from Palestine to the foot of the Zagros Mountains (between Iraq and Iran), is the most ancient seat of agriculture (between 12 000 and 8 500 B.C. according to various sources) and animal husbandry (8 000 B.C.). It would seem that as the result of several factors including the depletion of natural resources in connection with climate change and population growth, the hunter-gatherers in the region began to settle and to produce food by domesticating plants and animals and practising irrigation. But although the invention of irrigated agricultural production prompted the development of major civilisations, it also promoted the bondage of the peasantry. As Fernand Braudel puts it (1996), “whenever there is a transition from dry land to irrigated land [in the Mediterranean region], there is a transition from a relatively free peasantry to peasant slaves.” These dominated peasantries endured for several thousand years and they still persist today in the southern and eastern Mediterranean, whereas they were abolished within a few decades on the northern shores from the middle of the 20th century, entirely, or almost entirely, through modernisation policies.

Two agrarian societies coexisted for centuries: a sedentary peasant society, which took advantage of the complementa-

riety of land types, and an itinerant agropastoral society. In the 20th century, however, as the result of the development of economic activities, land privatisation, nomad settlement and crop farming, land was extensively reorganised through the colonisation of the rich agricultural plains, particularly along the Mediterranean coast, and the hinterlands and mountainous regions were gradually abandoned. The mark of pastoralism – the mobility of people and herds –, the collective use of vast territories and the persistence of the customary rights accompanying these practices still endure, however, in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region.

MILLIONS OF FAMILY FARMS

With some 17 million farms, the Mediterranean region has a working farm population of millions of people, 70% of whom are on the southern shores and 44% in two countries alone – Egypt and Turkey. Due to the history of the region, the diversity of its ecosystems and of the agricultural policies and production strategies pursued, these farmers have extremely varied profiles both in the South and in the North. Farms are mainly family-run, their differences being in the structures of farming families, the land they hold and the degree to which they are integrated into the market. It is the families who work the land directly: nuclear families on the northern shores (1.5 workers per farm), and extended families in the South, which generally consist of two or three households (6 to 12 people). The level of education of family farmers in the North has risen considerably (in France, one-third of farmers have secondary school or higher education). In the South, illiteracy is still widespread (46% in Tunisia), and most farmers have only primary education (84% in Tunisia). All of the Mediterranean countries pursued poli-

PEASANTS AND FARMERS, 7000 B.C.



cies for modernising their agricultural sectors in the second half of the 20th century in a context marked by the end of the second world war and the colonised countries’ return to independence. The objective was to integrate agriculture into the national reconstruction and development process and to enhance the efficiency of farming systems. Irrigation and land privatisation were the principal instruments used in these agricultural policies.

LAND STRUCTURES INCONDUCTIVE TO MODERNISING AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The development of agricultural production, but also of industrial and economic growth, is determined to a large extent by land structures. Although there is no optimal farm size, the fact that latifundia (vast farm estates) and

microfundia (small holdings) co-exist in most Mediterranean countries is an obstacle to land and labour productivity as well as to the competitiveness of farming systems.

The history of agrarian structures. The fact that there is such a vast number of microstructures is connected with the scarcity of resources and strong population pressure in the South and East. But it is also the mark of a long agrarian history dominated by a latifundia system, which structured the agricultural production areas of the Mediterranean region. This system originated in the Ottoman Empire (which stretched from Albania to Greece and from the Middle East to Egypt and as far as Tunisia) and in the Iberian Kingdom, and was extended to the French, British and Italian colonies (in the Maghreb, Egypt and Libya respectively) in the 19th and 20th centuries. In this land rent system agriculture was organised in large demesnes, which produced goods for export markets using low-paid agricultural labourers. It was abolished in the 20th century and modern agricultural systems were built up involving a high level of State investment, but the avenues followed in this process differed from one Mediterranean country to another: collectivisation followed by privatisation in the Balkans, Algeria and Tunisia, radical egalitarian agrarian reforms in Syria, Egypt, Greece and Albania, and the development of vast irrigated areas in Turkey, Morocco and Tunisia.

These countries are now endeavouring to reorganise their agricultural systems on the basis of a model with which most industrialised countries have succeeded in intensifying production and considerably enhancing productivity: the private individual family farm operating in a market economy. However, in a context of trade globalisation and State divestment there are many obstacles to the general

AGRARIAN REFORM AND COUNTER-REFORM IN EGYPT

The agrarian reform launched by the Nasser government was carried out in several phases with constant lowering of the land ownership ceiling: 200 feddans in 1952, 100 in 1961, and 50 in 1969. Since many landowners then carried out fictitious divisions amongst relatives, a considerable proportion of the agricultural area escaped the agrarian reform. Despite these concealment practices, however, many families received plots of land, and this resolved the landless peasantry issue at least in part. In addition to placing a ceiling on the size of farms, the Egyptian State imposed farm tenancy regulations on landowners which were very favourable for the peasantry (life-long leases and modest rents). Landowners were thus unable to put the rent up and tenant farmers enjoyed stable tenure for almost 4 decades.

An agrarian counter-reform was introduced in 1992 with a view to enhancing productivity and thus increasing cereal and export crop output, with which food imports could be financed. The purpose of those who inherited the *intifah* – the liberalisation process launched by Sadat in 1974 – was to suspend the land rent freeze that had been imposed by the 1952 agrarian reform. The reform made provision for raising rents in order to concentrate land in the hands of modern farmers, whose larger farms could provide a basis for intensifying production with a view to creating surpluses. This counter-reform resulted in land concentration and the exclusion of many peasant farmers; its effect on agricultural productivity was uncertain.

application of this model (lack of capital, lack of extension services for propagating knowledge and techniques, and lack of structures for organising the various related industries). Latifundia enclaves persist: thousands of hectares of agricultural land have recently been leased to rich countries that are seeking to externalise their agro-food production – as is happening all over the world. In the Mediterranean region, this massive appropriation of agricultural land (2.5 million hectares throughout the world in 2009) concerns Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, and Turkey, and it is the Gulf countries that are often the lessees.

Land distribution is still unequal. Despite the implementation of more or less active land reforms, land is still a resource that is very badly shared in the Mediterranean region, and this compromises access for the smallest holdings to other inputs. The situation in Tunisia is very revealing in this context: the proportion of farmers who have effected investments in each category of farm size increases with the size of the farms. And although there are still many small structures in the North there is a higher proportion of small farms in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries due to population growth and the fact that the other sectors have limited potential for absorbing workers. As a result, the land is fragmented, and this fragmentation is a handicap for modernising farming systems. The agricultural area in Turkey is as large as the area in France or Spain, for example, but the average farm acreage (6 ha) is less than one-eighth of the French average and less than one-quarter of the average in Spain.

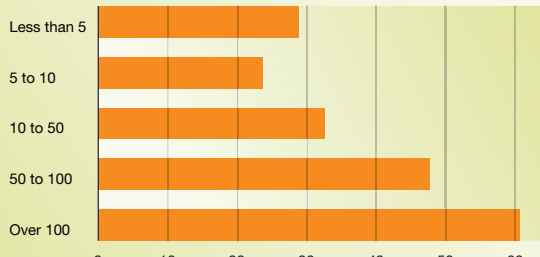
Analysis of farm structures in eight countries on both shores of the Mediterranean (France, Spain, Greece, Italy, Turkey, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) reveals three features of the Mediterranean farm structure landscape:

EXTRAORDINARY FARM DIVERSITY

1. there is a large number of small farms (less than 5 ha) on both the northern and southern shores, and particularly in Greece (76% of farms on 27% of the agricultural area), Italy (77% of farms on 17% of farmland), Morocco (71% of farms on 24% of farmland) and Turkey (67% of farms on 22% of farmland);
2. in France, small farms are marginal (22% on 1% of the agricultural area) and there is a large number of large farms – over 50 ha – (37% of farms on 81% of farmland);
3. there is marked concentration of land in Italy (2% of farms farm 39% of the agricultural area), Spain (10% of farms on 70% of farmland), Tunisia (3% of farms on 34% of farmland) and Algeria (2% of farms on 23% of farmland).

TUNISIA: FARMERS AND INVESTMENTS

Share of farmers who have effected investments, in each category as a % of the category total

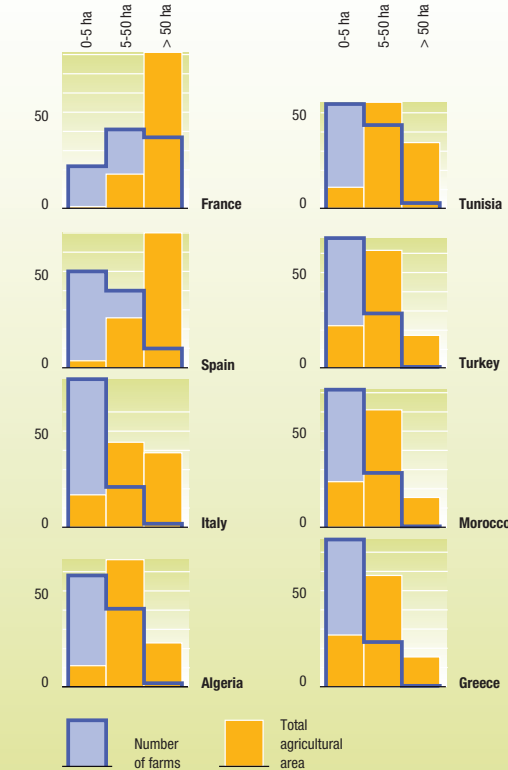


Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (Tunisia), Farm structure survey, 2004-2005.

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FARM STRUCTURES, 2005

Share of the number and acreage of small, medium-sized and large farms in the total number and total area, 2005
base 100 = national total



Sources: Ministry of Agriculture (Tunisia), Farm structure survey 1994-1995; Medagri 2006; Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Algeria), RGA (agricultural census) 2001; Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Maritime Fisheries (Morocco), RGA 1996; INS (national statistical institute) (Turkey), RGA 1991.

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RATHER DIFFERENT FARM STRUCTURES IN FRANCE

The average size of French farms is the largest of the entire Mediterranean basin. This feature is related in particular to the choices that the French authorities have made in farmland policy since 1945 (tenancy status). As a reminder, market policy comes under the CAP in the main, whereas farm structure policy is devolved to the national level.

The structural policy pursued in France has aimed to produce viable and efficient family farms. With this in view, the 1960 and 1962 agricultural guidance laws made provision in particular for encouraging older farmers to retire from farming and promoting mobility to regions that were to be developed. The land which thus became available was generally taken over by Land Management and Rural Establishment Agencies, which then allocated it preferably to farmers who met the modernisation criteria.

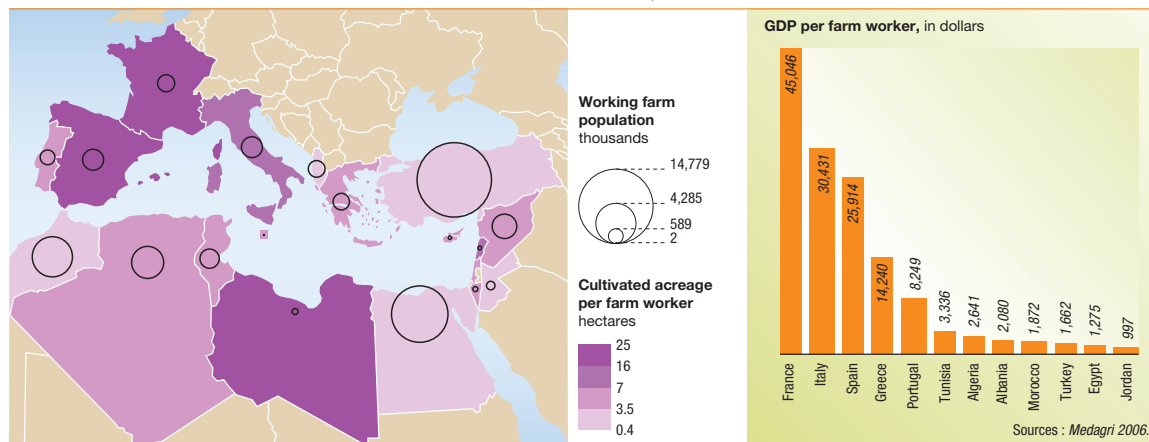
This increase in farm acreage was also facilitated by industrial development and subsequently by the tertiary sector in France, a situation which made it possible for a large proportion of the working farm population to move to sectors that were developing rapidly. This factor, which was very favourable in Europe, did not play a major role in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. The development of facilities and machinery on these growing farms was financed through a banking system specific to the agricultural sector. It was of course also promoted by the CAP, whose price guarantee system encouraged investments.

THE “END OF PEASANT FARMERS” IN THE NORTH?

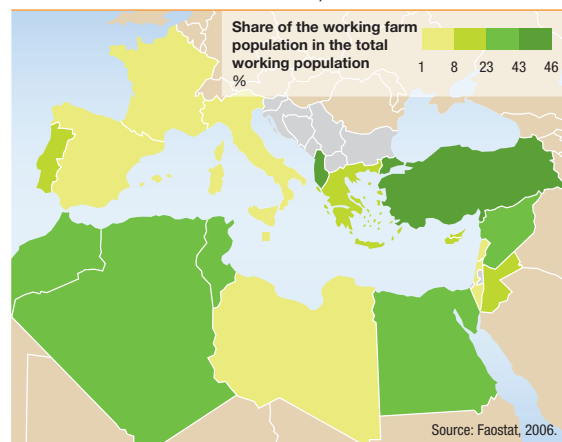
In the north-west of the Mediterranean region urban development and the rapid growth of industries and services, which have absorbed rural-urban migration, have resulted in the acceleration of agricultural modernisation. With the support of the common agricultural policy (CAP), land and labour productivity has been considerably increased through intensification and mechanisation. Labour productivity is 10 times higher in the northern Mediterranean countries, for example. The productivity gap per hectare is narrower, however, due to the development of irrigated crops and labour intensification in the South (the ratio is 1 to 5). Measured in terms of cultivated acreage per farm worker, the productivity differential is again clearly to the advantage of farmers in the North (although Libya is an exception in the South). Modernisation has resulted in land concentration, the specialisation of production systems and a high level of market integration. In France, the number of farms has been divided by 4 in 50 years, while the average farm acreage has increased (50 ha in 2005); in Italy, the number of farms has decreased by half in 35 years. These changes have been accompanied by an increase in the area of land under tenancy (72% in France) and a decrease in the number of farmers engaging in several different activities (15% in France).

So what has become of peasant farmers? There are now very few family producers living and working in village societies. Peasant farmers have become family agriculturalists (farm contractors), who are more autonomous in relation to local communities, less dependent on the vicissitudes of natural resources, but more subject to market rules, and who look upon the land primarily as a facility. Furthermore, the fact that the family-farm duo has grown apart and that objectives

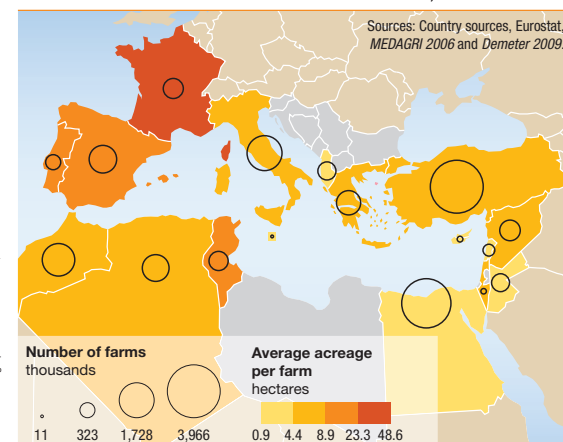
PRODUCTIVITY OF MEDITERRANEAN AGRICULTURAL SECTORS, 2003



WORKING FARM POPULATION, 2004



CURRENT AGRICULTURAL STRUCTURES, 2003



are no longer shared by the family group has meant that farms have lost part of their family dimension. European farming systems are becoming increasingly individualised, although the emotional and cultural bond with the land endures and land inheritance is generally still a family affair. This predominance of individual modern farms is thus a recent development in Western Europe and one that has been accompanied by the adaptation of farming methods involving the widespread use of mechanisation and the increasing use of immigrant labour. It must be stressed furthermore that the number of corporate farms with a variety of legal statuses has increased considerably: 25% of farms in France are corporate farms, and in 2005 they held or managed over half of the AAU (the average farm acreage being 100 ha). New farmers are now emerging in the 21st century who are abandoning the intensive farming model and adopting more environment-friendly farming methods in response to society's demand.

MODERNITY AND TRADITION IN THE SOUTH AND EAST

Contrary to the trend in the North, the farming population in the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries is continuing to increase in absolute terms. The working farm population has increased by over 7 million people, an increase which is actually relative compared to the overall population increase in the same period (+ 160 million people on the southern shores between 1965 and 2005). But although the proportion of farmers is diminishing in relative terms it is still high in some countries. The increase in the working farm population in absolute terms raises questions including that of what is to become of the many small farms. There is still marked dualism in these countries; it is an

age-old phenomenon, which originated in five centuries of latifundia and colonial systems and underlines the contrast between traditional and modern farmers. The former form a large peasantry, particularly in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and Turkey. The market integration of these farmers, who are still using outdated techniques, is low, so that the bulk of production is for the farmers' own consumption. The profiles of these traditional farmers, who are very dependent on the natural environment, vary: agropastoralists and herders in the steppelands, irrigator farmers in the oases, smallholders in regions of rain-fed agriculture. Many engage in several different activities. But with time these farms are gradually becoming fragmented due to the inheritance rules prevailing in most of the southern and eastern Mediterranean countries. The modern farmers generally have large farms and use modern farming methods, which are market-integrated and geared to export products. They are found mainly in the irrigated areas and cereal-growing plains or in regions where fruit-tree crops are produced (such as the Tunisian olive production region), where they increase the pressure on land and water resources. The differences in productivity and farm incomes between the small peasant farms and the large modern farms are considerable, both in irrigated agriculture (where the ratio is 1 to 12) and in rain-fed agriculture (a ratio of 1 to 7). What is more, incomes fluctuate widely in rain-fed regions due to climate hazards.

From decolonisation to globalisation. Agricultural policies sought for some time to attenuate this dualism by integrating the two sectors and overhauling farm structures. In the 1960s, Tunisia endeavoured to group small farms together, for example, by setting up production cooperatives around

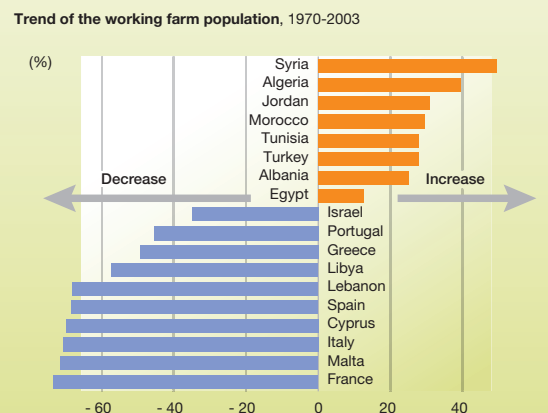
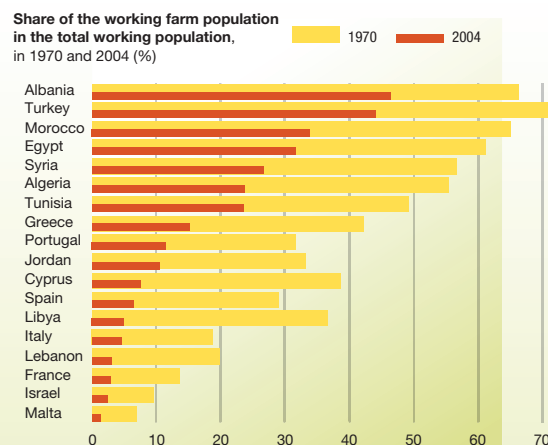
a core formed by the former colonial farms, and to build up homogeneous and modernised units. Similar efforts were made in the extensive State-owned irrigated areas in Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey. As the result of these policies all farmers were gradually integrated more and more into the market. But the dualism persisted and was even accentuated as the result of the liberal policies adopted by most countries. Although most countries (Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, etc.) pursued policies of investment incentives encouraging partnerships in the agricultural sector, these policies actually promoted the development of major corporate farms with international capital, which take out leases on land in order to farm it. In Tunisia, where the former colonists' land, which was nationalised in 1964, has been used to serve this policy, the various forms of corporate farms occupy approximately 364,000 hectares, i.e. 6.8% of farmland (farm structure survey, 2005). Furthermore, producer organisations and associations, which play an important role as partners of the administration in extension services for farmers, ought to have facilitated farm modernisation (access to natural resources and in particular to inputs, credit and the market). But both in Egypt, where civil society organisations, an ancient tradition in the country, are increasing (there were 35,000 in 1990), and in the Maghreb, where there is a profusion of institutions (agricultural cooperatives, inter-trade groups, associations, etc.), the small peasant farmer and poor farmer sector is absent from these structures. The new 2008 Green Morocco Plan, which is based on the two pillars of intensive agriculture and food production, actually seems to confirm this dualism. If there is no remedy for this dualism, how can small farms be prevented from drifting into permanent marginality? There are several solutions to this issue so crucial for the present and future of

Mediterranean rural areas; they include rural development, measures to diversify production and the recognition of regional multifunctionality.

From a more optimistic point of view, we would underline that there is a sector of family farms which are beginning to modernise their farming methods: they are enlarging their production structures, enhancing land and labour productivity, becoming involved in organised lines of production and becoming integrated into the market. Developing this third sector – situated between the poor farmer sector consisting of family microfarms and the corporate farming sector, which is geared to export markets – is a major political challenge; it would be a means of overcoming the dualism and guaranteeing the future of Mediterranean farming systems. For in an economic situation of price volatility and tension on international markets this type of agriculture seems best suited to meeting the objectives of the food security policies that the countries of the region, and in particular those on the southern shores, have introduced in response to the 2007-2008 crisis. ■

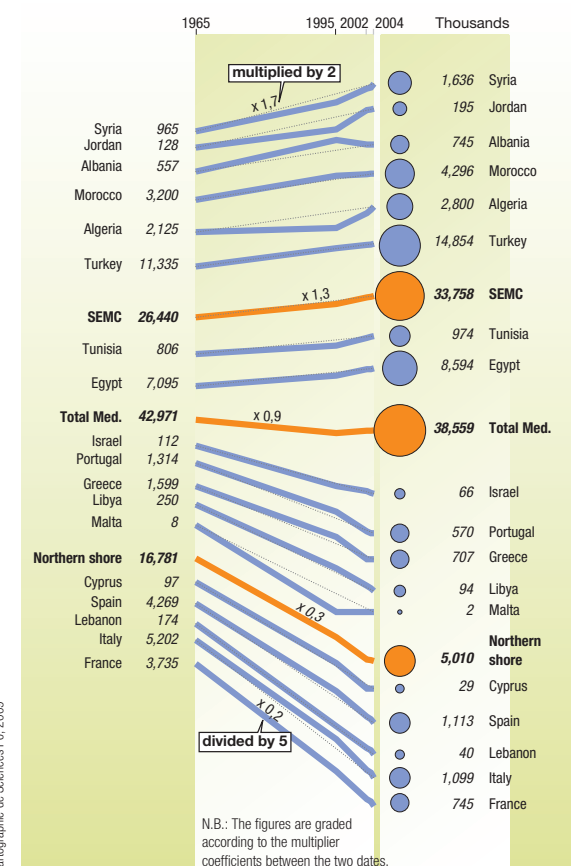


WORKING FARM POPULATION



Source: Our calculations adapted from FAO statistics.

TREND IN THE WORKING FARM POPULATION, 1965-2004



Source: Faostats, 2006.