

«Rural Household Resource Allocation»

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This study is a survey of rural households in Lebanon, covering ten families in each of four villages and representing different human and ecological zones in this country. The four villages are Ma'ad (Jubail, Mt. Lebanon), Sa'adin (Akkar), Ain-Zebdeh (Beka'a), Hassin (Kesrouan, Mt. Lebanon). The ten families were studied in depth, on the basis of family size, permanent residency, employment of head household, income, and land ownership.

The total population of the four villages is 1363; the smallest being Sa'adin, with 62 inhabitants, and the largest, Ain-Zebdeh with 950. The average overall family size is 5.6.

Since these villages are all located in rural districts, we should expect their inhabitants to take farming as their chief occupation, but this is not the case. The average proportion of those fully occupied with agriculture ranges from 28 – 67%, while 1 – 8% use agriculture as a part-time activity. The rest earn their incomes by holding various jobs in public works, services, business, industry and so on. In one village, Sa'adin, the whole cultivable area is utilized, while in Hassin (Kesrouan) utilization is only 10%; in Ain-Zebdeh, 59%; and in Ma'ad, 15%.

The fundamental fact which emerged from the survey is the general lack of interest in agriculture among the villagers. Working the land is not socially esteemed in Lebanon and it has the occupational disadvantage of being at the mercy of the weather. Except where landholdings are large and sufficiently remunerative to compensate for negative cultural evaluations, the work of a small landowner can hardly be considered as worthy of a successful farmer or country squire. "The attractions offered by steady work with a fixed salary and the rise in social standing which it represents, especially in a cosmopolitan city like Beirut, far outweigh any possible palliatives offered for small increases in Agricultural productivity."

The annual family income from agriculture ranges from a minimum of LL 900 per capita to a maximum of LL 12,000. The most favored geographic area, from the agricultural point of view, is Sa'adin (Akkar) where the entire land is cultivated.

The total per capita income for rural households (including agricultural and non-agricultural vocations) is between LL 2000 and LL 10,000/year.

Illiteracy seems to increase where cultivated land is larger in size with fewer good schools nearby. More access to education creates a tendency to emigrate with a decreasing interest in agricultural work.

That is to say, the distribution of educational services is highly unbalanced. Each of the four villages, except little Sa'adin, contains only a government elementary school. The closest secondary school is 6-10 kms. away from them. Health and social services are almost non-existent. These limiting educational factors encourage illiteracy and stem opportunity for emigration, keeping many working on small land holdings close by their homes and families.

The modern arab family is the unit in these four villages but vestiges of the extended family exist, especially in isolated areas like Hassin, in Kesrouan. Equally in this village, the status of women seems to be more stagnant than in Ma'ad or Ain-Zebdeh where women and children, especially those who have received some education, are allowed a share in discussions and decision-making, concerning the education of children and household expenditures.

The problem which faces those interested in village welfare, deduced from this study, is that of improving the conditions of agriculture, education, and the standard of living in the Lebanese village, so that the villagers may be persuaded to remain and give up the desire to emigrate. Education should be adapted to the needs of the villagers in such a way as to succeed in eradicating the old-fashioned, depreciative attitude toward farming and restoring love for the soil and pleasure in cultivating it. Education should encourage cooperative work by the educated minority with the aim of creating more active cultural life which, supported by the natural charms of village life, will make the rural setting an attractive place to work and live.