

● Agriculture

(Continued from Page 1)
rolled in school in Libya.

Agriculture in Libya exists chiefly in a narrow coastal zone and the Gebel (mountain), a plateau about 2,000 feet above sea level that extends a few miles into the desert. Beyond the Gebel there is only sparse vegetation, an occasional oasis and miles of sand.

Rainfall in the coastal zone and Gebel permits olive and date production. The Barce plains, a relatively small area in the Gebel, are farmed with tractors for the production of barley. Here the rainfall is 15 to 20 inches each year but occurs only from October to May.

Historically, the Barce plains produced grain for the expansion of the Roman Empire which included North Africa more than 2,000 years ago. Still present, are cisterns, irrigation ditches, and sewers showing how water was conserved and used to support a population about twice as great as now.

Livestock Industry

Animal wealth, as the industry is termed, consists of about 2.5 million animals with sheep and goats representing 1 million each, camels about ¼ million and donkeys and cattle the remainder. Grazing is the only source of feed for range animals on which they do fairly well when rainfall occurs from October until April. During the annual dry period, most severe during July, August and September when no rain falls, animals exist on dried up range, stubble and built-in body reserves. Sheep are of the Barbary and Awassi (fat-tailed) breeds in which 10 to 12 lbs of fat may be stored in the tail during the grazing period. The animal exists on this stored fat for 100 to 150 days when grazing is limited.

About every five years an extended drought occurs, causing tremendous loss of animals from hunger. Recently the entire lamb crop in the Tobruk area was lost in two successive years because of pre-natal starvation. Each year there is a great loss of animal performance due to starvation early in life, which causes the death of many lambs, young goats, calves and severely limits mature body size. Donkeys were observed to become progressively smaller as one traveled into the drought area, indicating natural selection and adaptation to environment. Some of these donkeys appeared to be too small to accomplish any purpose except to graze and reproduce.

Major income from the livestock industry is market lambs in April and May, wool production and hides of slaughtered animals. Camels, "ships of the desert," also represent about one-third of the total meat produced.

Agricultural Problems

Severe over-grazing of denuded areas has created tremendous losses of soil and water resources. Lack of vegetative ground cover causes rapid run-off of rainfall, carrying top soil and fresh water to the sea. Vast wadis (water courses) now mark the route Libyan soil has been carried by fresh water to the sea for centuries.

Attempts to limit grazing to one adult sheep for each 20 to 30 hectares (one hectare equals 2½ acres), the recommended carrying capacity of the range, is limited by tribal

ownership and use of all grazing areas. This lack of individual ownership of land severely limits and prevents individual responsibility in the conservation of natural resources, construction of animal shades, and preservation of roughage for annual dry periods when pastures do not provide adequate feed.

In olive groves, cultivation is usually up and down the

slope, permitting and encouraging widespread erosion from water. Contour farming is unknown, at least is not practiced. Tribal customs prevent the castration of male animals not needed for breeding purposes or the sale of female animals to reduce livestock numbers to the carrying capacity of the range.

Feed Needs

Animal feeds to supplement local feedstuffs are not free. (Continued on Page 9)

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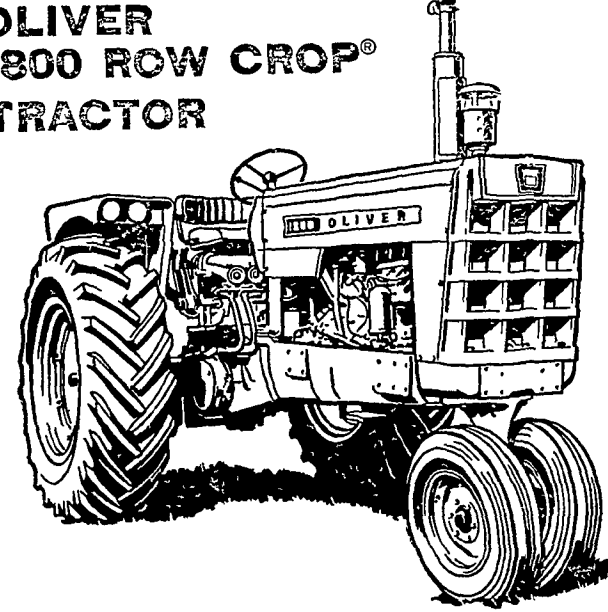
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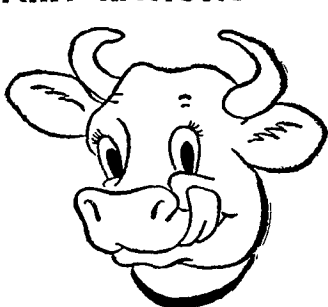

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