

## Inside this issue

*New Orientations of Syrian Agricultural Policy*

*NENARNAP: A Network for Agricultural Policies*

*Policy Brief on WTO & Developing Countries*

*The State of Food and Agriculture in Syria 2005*

*NAPC Visitors*

*Two NAPC Staff in the UK*

*Management Workshop*

*International Cooperation*

*The 6<sup>th</sup> Scientific Committee Meeting*

*Project Steering Committee Meeting*

### **Dear Reader,**

The efforts of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform and the FAO Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA, funded by the Italian Government, are concentrating on making the National Agricultural Policy Center (NAPC) a fully operative and sustainable institution.

This 7<sup>th</sup> issue of our Newsletter includes a review of the activities carried out by the NAPC over the period March - September 2005. The new NAPC organizational structure has been implemented, a sustainability monitoring system has been established, and an information system has been developed. The next actions to be taken will be the transfer to the new building and the recruitment of new staff.

Regarding the NAPC orientation to furthering scientific and technical cooperation with international research institutions, two agreements were concluded with the Italian Centro di Portici, and the Spanish Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (UPV), aiming to exchange experiences and carrying out common researches and studies.

The fields of collaboration include, among others: agricultural policies and agro-food systems analysis; rural development policies; as well as natural resource management policies.

As for the last on-the-job training activities, the staff participated in a workshop on Management, held at the NAPC premises for one week and conducted by the Administrative Staff College of India, and in a two-week course on Supply & Demand Analysis. The latter was attended by the NAPC staff as well as by five other participants from other departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, the General Commission for Agricultural Scientific Research, the University of Damascus - Faculty of Agriculture.

Moreover, many staff members were involved in training activities, both locally - English language courses - and abroad - international workshops-, while others enrolled in Master and PhD programs.

The NAPC has recently published the 2005 issue of the periodical report on the State of Food and Agriculture in Syria, and a study on the comparative advantages of Syrian commodities, in addition to a number of working papers. All these publications are available online at the Center's website: [www.napcsyr.org](http://www.napcsyr.org).

We always look forward to your constant participation and welcome your comments and suggestions.



*The participants of the Management Workshop*

## New Orientations of Syrian Agricultural Policy

A seminar on “New Orientations of Syrian Agricultural Policy” was delivered by Mr Erfan Alloush, Advisor to the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, on 22 June 2005, at the NAPC premises. This activity, organized within the framework of the Agricultural Policy Forum initiative by the National Agricultural Policy Center with the support of the FAO Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA, aimed at briefing national stakeholders on the new broad agricultural policy orientations and strategies adopted in order to foster Syrian agriculture development.

The lecturer illustrated the state of Syrian agriculture describing its determinants and challenges. Then, he analyzed the policies and strategies required to achieve the agricultural development objectives described in a study conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform and endorsed by the Cabinet on 8/2/2005. The conclusions drawn by this study, inter alia, comprise: the optimal use of natural resources, the



Mr Erfan Alloush

enhancement of the Syrian financial and credit system, the set-up of mechanisms to supervise the agricultural sector, the adoption of pricing policies as an instrument for environment conservation and resources sustainability, and the

implementation of the Integrated Pest Management approach to control plant pests using careful monitoring of pests and weeds.

The audience was involved in a debate that contributed to the enhancement of dialogue and exchange of information on agricultural economic affairs and, therefore, on the new policies designed to meet the current needs of Syrian agricultural development.

To download the proceedings of the seminar go to

[www.napcsyr.org/new\\_pol\\_orientation.htm](http://www.napcsyr.org/new_pol_orientation.htm)



### STAFF DEVELOPMENT

**Mrs Abeer Munlahasan**, NAPC staff member, enrolled in a PhD program at the University of Damascus with the supervision of the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) in 2005. She is developing a dissertation on “Assessing the Economic, Social, and Environmental Impacts of Mechanized Micro-Catchments Water Harvesting on Syrian Rangelands Communities”.

**Mr Akram Shhaideh**, NAPC staff member, registered in the Distance Learning PhD Program of the University of Bucharest, Romania, in 2004. The title of his PhD research

is “The Impact of Agricultural Policies on the Development of the Agricultural Sector in Syria”.

**Mr Nouman Al Ammouri**, NAPC staff member, with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform and in collaboration with CIHEAM (Centre International de Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Méditerranéennes), enrolled in a Post Graduate Course at the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of CHANIA, Greece, in 2004, as initial step in pursuance of the Master’s Degree in Business Economics and Management.



## Malaysian Delegation

A Malaysian Delegation of 7 members representing different public and private economic bodies visited the NAPC on 28 April 2005. The visit contributed to the enhancement of economic cooperation between Syria and Malaysia in several domains including trade relations, agro-industry investment, and crop post-harvesting treatment.

The Malaysian Delegation was acquainted with the Center's economic and social research activities, that are contributing to the ongoing process of Syrian economy modernization, particularly of the agricultural sector. Hence, the delegation members expressed their

interest in collaborating with the NAPC on issues of mutual concern for both parties.



## Arab Association for Agricultural Socio-Economic Sciences

In June 2005, a delegation of three members of the Executive Board of the Arab Association for Agricultural Socio-Economic Sciences – Branch of Syria working under the supervision of the “Arab Agricultural Engineering Federation”, visited the Centre to develop and exchange information and collaboration. This event

allowed the NAPC staff to have a comprehensive overview of the Association objectives, activities, and organizational structure.

The Association, focusing on Arab countries, conducts studies and researches in the field of agricultural economics, sociology and subjects related to agriculture development. Among its activities, it carries out seminars and participates in national and international events.

## International Experts



Mr D. Abdou, *Chief of the Policy Assistance Branch at the FAO Regional Office for the Near East (Egypt)*



Mr C. Cafiero, *University of Naples (Italy)*



Mr F. De Filippis, *University of Rome (Italy)*



Mr J. M. Garcia Alvarez Coque, *Universidad Politécnic de Valencia (Spain)*



Mr M. Gioia, *FAO Consultant (Italy)*



Mr M. Gorgoni, *University of Rome (Italy)*



Ms C. Grillone, *FAO Consultant (Italy)*

Ms K. Murthy, *Administrative Staff College- ASCI (India)*



Mr S. Padam, *Administrative Staff College- ASCI (India)*



Mr N. S. Parthasaraty, *FAO Consultant (India)*



Mr P.T. Perri, *FAO Consultant (Italy)*



Ms M. G. Quieti, *Senior Agricultural Policy Support Officer, FAO, TCAS (Italy)*



Mr D. Romano, *University of Florence (Italy)*



Mr F. Viciani, *FAO Consultant (Italy)*



## The Near East and North Africa Network for Agricultural Policies (NENARNAP)



The Near East & North Africa Network for Agricultural Policies (NENARNAP), established by the FAO Regional Office for the Near East (RNE), and officially launched in December 2003 in Amman, Jordan, is intended to be instrumental in facilitating regional and international co-operation and providing the opportunity of exchanging experiences and

lessons in the Region.

The NENARNAP members are 17: Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemen.

The overall NENARNAP objective is to support the efforts of member countries to achieve sustainable agricultural development through the adoption of economically viable, environmentally sound and socially acceptable agricultural policies. The immediate objectives of the network are to enhance capabilities of policy analysts, practitioners and institutions in member countries and to collect, document, synthesize, exchange and disseminate information on agricultural policy experiences on a regular basis among network members as well as among agriculture-related organizations.

In this regard, the NENARNAP has recently held a technical workshop on "Agricultural Investment in the Near East: Constraints and Prospects", concurrently with the first annual meeting of the Executive Committee, organized by FAO in collaboration with the Tunisian Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources (MAHY) in Tunisia on 14 - 16 June 2005.

The Workshop aimed at enhancing the capacity of NENARNAP national focal persons to analyze and formulate policies for a more conducive economic environment, as well as for sustainable increase of agricultural investment in the Near East Region.

As NENARNAP is a member of the Network, the NENARNAP Director, Mr Atieh El Hindi, participated in the workshop, presenting a country study on "Agricultural Investment Conditions in Syria."

The NENARNAP Executive Committee accepted the invitation of the Syrian Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform to hold the next technical meeting in Syria, in parallel with the General Network Conference, by 2006. The Committee agreed to extend its own mandate for one more year. The participants also agreed on a short-list of potential activities, funded by FAO-RNE, to be addressed in the NENARNAP work-plan such as launching a website, preparing a newsletter and establishing an electronic mailing list to initiate the exchange of information and ideas among all Network members.

### TRAINING ABROAD

#### *In Italy*

Mr Mamoun Rahhal, the NENARNAP librarian, visited the FAO -David Lubin- library in Rome, Italy, for a study tour of two weeks in April 2005, in order to be acquainted with the activities of an international



library and to be provided with on-the-job training in software usage, particularly the WEBAGRIS, and library management tools & systems. The valuable visit helped the NENARNAP librarian to improve the operations of the Center Library, catalogue the holdings and maintain a virtual library of electronic materials.

#### *In the United Kingdom*

Two NENARNAP staff participated in the 38<sup>th</sup> edition of the University of Essex Summer School, UK, during the period 9 July - 6 August 2005

Besides having attended a module on mathematics for social scientists, Mr

Bashar Nahas and Mr Firas Haydar were trained, respectively, in programming in SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Studies), and Survey Research Methods and Analysis.

The training period offered to both researchers a valuable opportunity to participate in a variety of workshops on the development of new software

applications and current researches.



## SOFAS 2005

The State of Food and Agriculture 2005 has been published this September. It portrays the current state and the evolution of the Syrian agricultural sector, with a focus on the period 2001-2003.

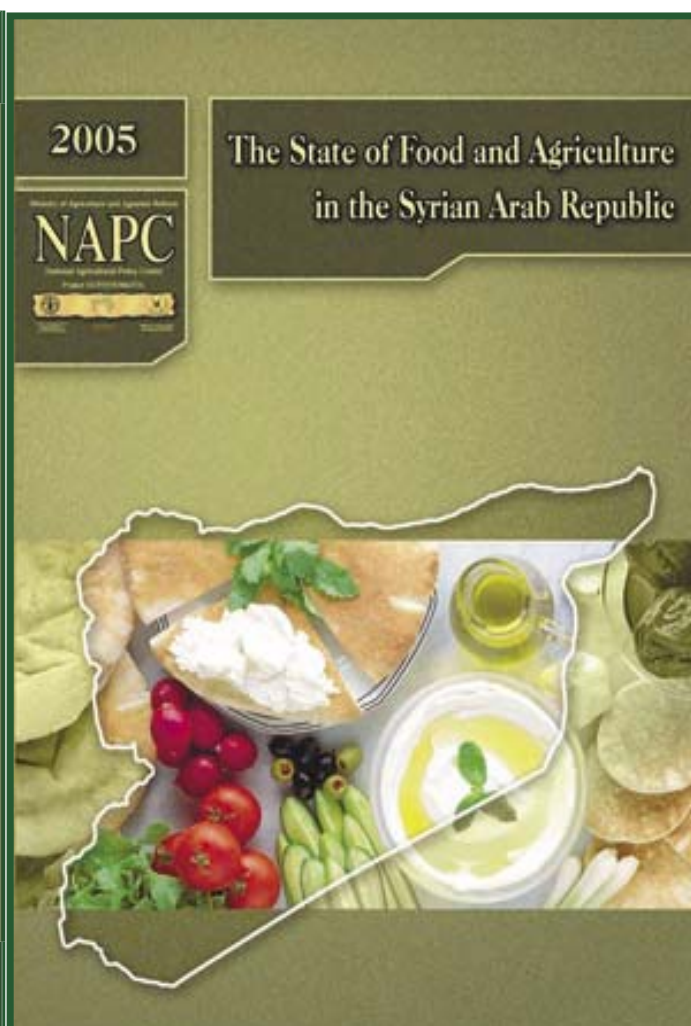
Designed to support economic and social development in Syria, this well-documented information source on agro-food issues intends to stimulate the debate on agricultural policies and to facilitate the mobilization of all stakeholders for the success of the Syrian ongoing policy reform process.

Besides giving an overview of Syrian climatic conditions and natural resources, SOFAS 2005 illustrates the contribution of agriculture to the national economy and reviews recent and emerging trends in the development of agricultural policies and supporting services. An outline of the Syrian agro-food industry is followed by an analysis of food production, and availability for consumption.

A special chapter, devoted to the comparative advantages of Syrian agriculture, assesses the competitiveness of selected commodity chains for the following agricultural products: wheat, cotton, olives, tomatoes, oranges, and cattle. The comparative advantages are a crucial reference for policy formulation especially in consideration of the fact that the country is increasingly opening to the world economy, and thus facing growing competition from foreign suppliers.

To download the report go to

[www.napcsyr.org/periodical\\_reports.htm](http://www.napcsyr.org/periodical_reports.htm)



## INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### *In Belgium*

In the light of the Association Agreement between Syria and the European Union, and in order to enrich the NAPC staff knowledge about the EU and its provisions, four members, namely Mr H. Al-Ashkar and Mr I. Ismail, in May 2005, and Ms H. Bagasa and Mr M. Al Shareef, in July 2005, participated in the EuroMed Training of Public Administrations, in Brussels, with the financial support provided by the European Commission,

within the framework of the MEDA Programme.

The five-day seminar aimed to provide training in European affairs to civil

servants from the Southern Mediterranean and the Middle East, also to envisage the creation of a network of training centers in public administrations among the Euro-Mediterranean Partners.



### *In Jordan*

Mr Firas Yasin, NAPC staff, participated in the 5-day international workshop on "Role of Modern Irrigation Techniques in Improving Food Security" held in Amman, Jordan, from 1 to 7 May 2005. The workshop aimed at presenting the



experiences of the participating countries in the adoption of modern irrigation methods, focusing on their effects on agricultural production and water savings. During this workshop, Mr Yasin submitted a presentation on "Economic Incentives to Adopt Modern Irrigation".

## WTO Negotiations: Will developing countries benefit from a new agreement?

*This policy brief was presented by Mr Mahmoud Babbili, NAPC researcher, during the last Steering Committee Meeting.*

Developing countries did not reach yet a common position on essential issues. Therefore, is there any possibility for them to really benefit from a new agreement? This is what this policy brief is discussing, taking into consideration the recent agreements reached under the umbrella of the WTO.

The negotiations, held in Cancun in 2003, ended without producing any agreement, but giving an indicator of a new balance of power, resulting from the emergence of the G20, a group of developing countries that includes major players such as Brazil, India, and China, considered as a counterweight to the EU and the US.

Thereafter, the “July Package agreement”, adopted by WTO Members in August 2004, established a framework for agricultural negotiations modalities (more detailed commitments), articulated around the three pillars of agricultural negotiations: market access, domestic support, and export competition.

The agreement commitments involving developed and developing countries regarded the reduction of the highest levels of trade distorting support and tariffs; market access improvement for all products; and full elimination of export subsidies. Applying these commitments will lead to a more open and competitive world market, and

hence will benefit the developing countries.

Moreover, the running negotiations consider technical issues, such as the conversion of “specific tariffs”, based on values per ton, into their ‘ad valorem’ equivalents, and the arguable question of “how to translate non-trade barriers into tariffs”.

Since developed countries’ agricultural subsidies seem to be a stumbling block, are those countries ready for a new Agreement on Agriculture?

There is a cautious optimism on this issue for some reasons: multilateral talks are back on the rails again; the EU is prepared to negotiate on agricultural subsidies; and the expansion of EU membership will cause a reduction of its average subsidy.

The policy brief concludes that multilateral trade liberalization is expected to benefit all partners, and the agricultural reform would reduce rural poverty in developing economies, with positive impacts on development.

The policy brief is available at [www.napcsyr.org/division\\_tpd.htm](http://www.napcsyr.org/division_tpd.htm)



## TRAINING IN SYRIA

### English Language Training Courses

In response to the Center’s request for assistance to improve English Language skills, the FAO Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA has financed since April 2005 the enrollment of the NAPC technical and support staff in language-training courses at

the British Council (BC) and the American Language Center (ALC) in Damascus. This initiative allows the NAPC staff to receive qualified training tailored to individual levels of language proficiency. It is regarded as a very valuable occasion for skills and performance improvement and as a resource functional to the accomplishment of NAPC’s future duties.



### Web Design Foundations

Mr Hassan Al Moujahed, NAPC staff, is following a course on website development foundations in Damascus, with the purpose of enhancing his capacity to manage the

intranet and web site of the NAPC and of acquiring web techniques. The course covers the theoretical fundamentals of web design, web server, and other server-side web technologies.

## Management Workshop by ASCI Experts

A workshop on management was held at the NAPC premises from 17 to 21 July 2005. The objective of the workshop was to acquaint selected NAPC staff with managerial concepts and practices. The training was delivered by two lecturers from the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), namely Ms B. Kinnera Murthy and Mr S. Padam, with the assistance of Mr N.S. Parthasarathy, the International Institutional Consultant recruited by the FAO Project to support the NAPC.

The workshop, complemented with integrating sessions - SWAT analysis, role play and team exercises - aimed at developing the organizational planning and management skills of the staff. The exposure to the importance of management concepts improved the NAPC organizational communication, teamwork and interdepartmental coordination.



## Supply & Demand Analysis

A two-week training course, from 28 August to 8 September, in “Concepts and Quantitative Methods for Supply & Demand Analysis of Agro-food Commodities” was delivered at the NAPC premises by Dr C. Cafiero, FAO consultant from the University of Naples, Italy.

The course covered economic theory and econometric practices, aggregate agricultural supply analysis, and food consumption analysis.

In addition to selected NAPC members, mainly from the Agro-Food Division (AFD), other 5 participants from the General Commission for Agricultural Scientific Research (GCASR), the Ministry of Agriculture – Departments of Agricultural Economics, and Statistics and Planning - as well as the University of Damascus - Faculty of Agriculture - attended the course.



## GIS Training Course

Mr Yahia Dahash, NAPC staff, attended a course on “Principles of Geographical Information System (GIS)” in June 2005 in Damascus, at the Hi-tech House, an institution certified by ESRI, leading software company in the field. The course was about ArcGIS programme and its components - Arc Map and Catalogue - including theoretical and practical classes on ArcGIS for designing, creating, and editing a GIS database.





### ***The 6th Scientific Committee Meeting***

The sixth Scientific Committee (SC) meeting was held at the NAPC premises, during May 10-12, 2005. The SC is composed of two international members, Mr F. Viciani and Mr F. De Filippis, and two national members, Mr M. Khazma and Mr M. Yassin. The Committee reviewed the ongoing studies and researches being conducted by the Center, and evaluated its recent activities.

Divisions coordinators presented the output of the last period and answered questions raised by committee members and NAPC staff members.

### ***The 6th Steering Commission Meeting***

On 17 July 2005, the NAPC Steering Commission, chaired by H.E. Dr N. Rasheed Mohammed, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, and composed of representatives of other ministries, held its sixth meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform premises.

The Commission discussed the NAPC Progress Report for 2005 and endorsed its modified Work Plan for 2005.

### ***International Cooperation***

With a view to enhancing linkages and cooperation with international research institutions, the NAPC has recently signed a cooperation agreement with the «Centro per la Formazione in Economia e Politica dello Sviluppo Rurale (Centro di Portici)» in Italy, while the second one is being discussed with the «Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (UPV)», in Spain.

Both agreements build up cooperation in a spirit of mutual understanding and goodwill to promote the advancement of

development-oriented scientific research and education in the field of sustainable agriculture. The parties agreed to develop activities based on their respective academic, educational and technical needs and priorities. These agreements should be reviewed and renewed by mutual consent every five years.

### ***Project Steering Committee Meeting***

In a spirit of continuous and fruitful cooperation, representatives of Syria, Italy, and FAO met on the occasion of the second Steering Committee of the Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA - phase 3, held at the NAPC premises, on 6- 7 September 2005.

The Committee discussed recent progresses in Project implementation as well as the detailed plan of activities for the next 2 years, including support to NAPC management, staff training, as well as assistance to policy analysis activities and to the production and dissemination of information relevant for the economic analysis of Syrian agriculture.

On this occasion, the Steering Committee also met the NAPC staff in an Information and Exchange Session, during which the NAPC Division Coordinators and selected researchers briefed the attendants on the divisions' work plans for 2006 and the ongoing research activities of the Center.



### ***Workshop on the Syrian- EU Association Agreement***

Mr Atieh El Hindi, NAPC Director, participated in the workshop "Aspects and Challenges of the Syrian - EU Association Agreement", held in Latakia on 15 September 2005.

During this workshop, he gave a presentation on "Agriculture in the Syrian-EU Association Agreement".

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