Managing feed resources in Jordan’s agro-pastoral production systems

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One of the most pressing constraints facing dryland livestock farmers is the limited availability of feed — a significant threat to the fertility and performance of herds, a mainstay of agricultural production systems in arid and semi-arid regions. Sustainable and cost-effective solutions are therefore desperately needed to provide a stable source of nutrients capable of maintaining healthy reproductive cycles.

To this end, Dryland Systems scientists from the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), and their national partners at Jordan’s National Center for Agricultural Research and Extension (NCARE), have initiated discussions on current problems and the practices required to rehabilitate rangelands and improve resting and feed calendars.

This discussion will involve farmers, extension agents, and scientists, and solutions will be disseminated through Farmer Field days (FFDs). A recent FFD, organized jointly by Dryland Systems and the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture, and Food Security, dealt with the issue of over-grazing and explored why over-exploitation had intensified in recent years.

One farmer pointed out: “In the past, we were all working on our fields, so were able to protect them from other herders entering. But, now we are all working for the government in offices and no longer work on the farm, so we’re not able to protect our fields anymore.”

Another farmer suggested that previous rules no longer applied – possibly the result of feed sources becoming increasingly scarce: “Before, farmers just put some stones on the edge of their fields and this was enough to prevent herders from entering into the field with their herds. But now, this system is not functioning anymore.”

Finally, it was argued that the decline of traditional structures was to blame: “We used to hire rangers to protect parts of the rangeland, and if someone entered, a fine had to be paid to the local community. While the tribal land tenure system does not exist anymore, a new system hasn’t been set up”.

The solutions proposed to farmers included proven water harvesting techniques like contour furrowing and scarification, and the planting of drought-tolerant pastoral shrubs such as Atriplex halimus or Salvia vermiculata.

The use of these pastoral resources will not only mitigate the costs of fodder in Jordan’s Badia - or rangelands – but also contribute to the sustainability of livestock production systems. Cactus also demonstrates significant potential as a sustainable source of animal feed – and may also have a dual purpose since its fruit can be sold to supplement household income. ICARDA is now considering promoting the plant to farmers.

Finally, the need for improved coordination and collaboration among agro-pastoralists was raised - common property rangelands can only be managed sustainably and effectively if an entire community is aware of prevailing regulations and the benefits of commonly-held land. During droughts, in particular, a well-managed common rangeland provides users with greater flexibility – to go and graze where it is greener. Private land tenures, by comparison, offer extremely restrictive grazing possibilities.

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