

Issue N° 4 - April 2004

**Dear Reader,**

The National Agricultural Policy Center (NAPC) has been implementing its activities with the support of the FAO Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA, funded by the Italian Government.

The Regional Workshop on "Institution Building for Agricultural Policies in the Near East", held on 6 and 7 December 2003 in Damascus, was the most significant event organized by the Center jointly with the FAO during the last few months.

Moreover, three researches on Comparative Advantage, Farming Systems and Monitoring Policy Impact of GAFTA are about to be completed by NAPC task forces.

The Center has also recently published the periodical report on Syrian Agricultural Trade (SAT 2003) while the Syrian Agricultural Database is now available on



Internet, NAPC Intranet and CD Rom.

In order to enhance the dialogue on agricultural policy and related issues, two more seminars were organized within the Agricultural Policy Forum initiative. The first examined the impacts of the Great Arab Free Trade Area on Arab economies, whereas the second introduced the relation between Food Security and Development.

Additional 18 researchers, selected among the participants of the GCP and TCP training projects, were recruited to enhance NAPC human resources.

Eventually, we are pleased to inform you that a third phase of the Project has been approved for the three coming years (2004 – 2007) in order to consolidate NAPC capacity and ensure its sustainability.

We highly appreciate your participation in our initiatives and welcome your suggestions that will develop and enhance our efforts in the future.

## Inside this issue

NAPC New Organizational Structure	2
Regional Workshop	4
Syrian Agricultural Trade	5
Agricultural Policy Forum	6
Syrian Agriculture at the Crossroads	7
Flash News	8

## Special points of interest

- The Great Arab Free Trade Area
- Food Security & Development
- The NAPC New Organization Chart
- Workshop on Institution Building in the Near East
- Tripartite Review of the Project: FAO-ITALY-SYRIA

# NAPC New Organizational Structure

The new NAPC organizational structure that will be experimented during the last quarter of 2004 is part of the Midterm Work Plan 2004-2007 which will be implemented with the support of the new phase of the FAO Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA.

The general objective of the new organizational structure is to distribute tasks and responsibilities to the NAPC staff. This is a delicate choice, since it has to balance three different needs: i) ensuring all the possible synergies within and among different groups of activities, ii) maximizing staff commitment with adequate individual incentives at all levels of responsibility, and iii) balancing the opposite needs of specialization and integration in executing activities.

In order to implement the very ambitious objectives of the Work Plan, the NAPC technical staff will be increased up to a number of 32 researchers, including the four members undertaking post graduate studies abroad who will return by the end of the year.

## **Proposed Organization**

Five divisions compose the proposed structure. Three of them are going to work in different areas of research and policy analysis (Trade, Agro-food System, Sustainable Rural Development); a fourth one will include all the synergic activities related to the implementation of an external and internal information and communication system, while the fifth one will be responsible for general support services and administration.

### **Research and Policy Analysis Divisions**

The Trade and Trade Policy division has a priority in consideration of the clear choice of the Syrian Government for a gradual integration into the world economy, realized through the establishment of international links, the signature of bilateral and regional agreements, and the possible adhesion of the country to the WTO.

The Agro-food System and related policies division focuses its research work on comparative advantage, farming systems, agricultural production prices, supply/demand,

marketing and consumption patterns.

The Sustainable Rural Development division tackles environmental and resource economics, rural institutions and their role in rural development, rural income and poverty, and rural-urban migration.

### **Technical Support Divisions**

The Communication and Information division includes all the activities related to the implementation and the maintenance of the information system (Website, Intranet, Newsletter, Publications, Library, Statistical Database) and to the organization of a documentation center. The General Service and Administration division will provide the administrative, translation and training services.



***The NAPC technical staff will be increased up to a number of 32 researchers***

### **Deputy Directors and Director's Staff**

Two Deputy Directors assist the NAPC Director. The Deputy Director for research is assigned with the responsibility of coordinating all the work carried out within the research and policy divisions and supervising the activities performed by the inter-divisions task forces.

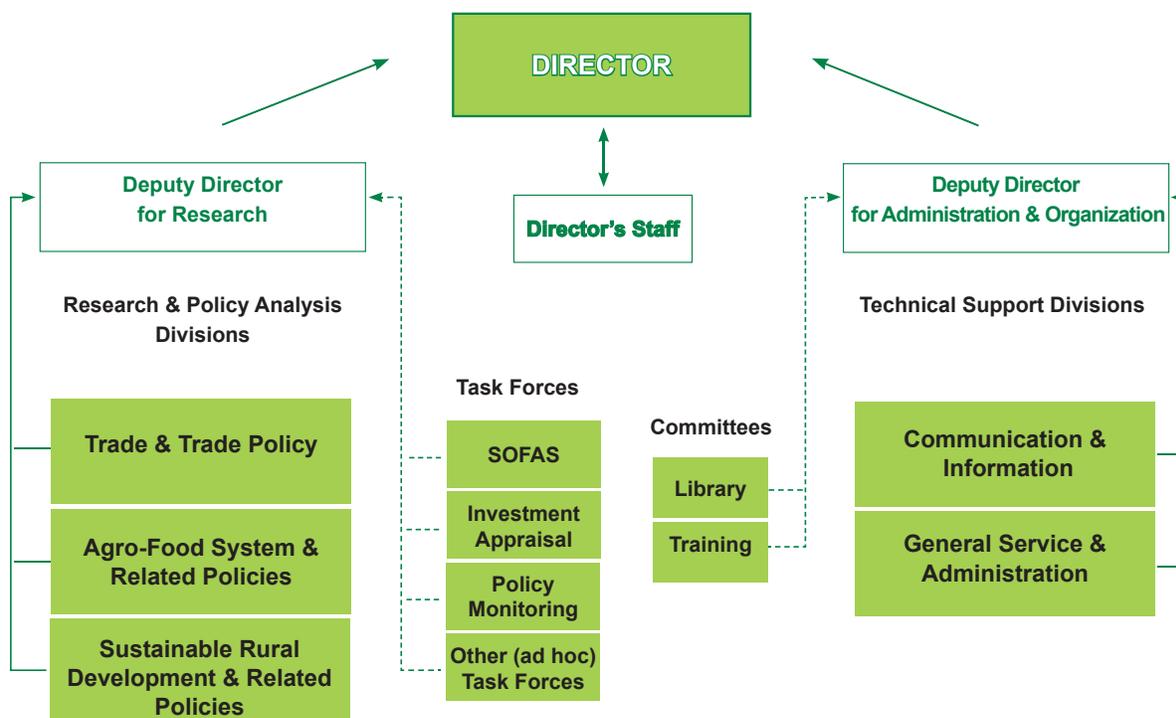
The Deputy Director for administration is responsible for supervising logistic, administration and communication activities, and for assisting the NAPC Director in developing relations with external institutions.

### **Task Forces and Committees**

Task forces and Committees will be set up to perform, respectively, research or organizational activities that call for mutual cooperation, coordination and multi-disciplinary expertise.

The Director's staff has been assigned to work under the direct supervision of the Director, assisting him in current affairs and emerging issues, with special reference to the tasks performed in response to specific requests of policy makers.

The SOFAS task force will be in charge of the crucial undertaking of preparing the report on the State of Food and Agriculture in Syria.



The Policy Monitoring task force has been set up for the experimental work on the implementation of the GAFTA Agreement initiated in 2003; it will be maintained in order to extend the application of the built up methodology to other topics or case studies.

The Investment Appraisal task force will be established to gradually prepare the Center to act as an agency performing projects analysis and appraisal in coordination with other related MAAR departments.

With regard to the Committees, they will be constituted in relation to the organizational issues concerning common services for which a need will arise.



## Visiting Experts

Mr B. Abrash, State Planning Commission (Syria)

Mr I. Amouri, FAO Consultant (Morocco)

Mr M. Ashram, University of Damascus (Syria)

Mr M. De Benedictis, University of Rome "La Sapienza" (Italy)

Mr M. Fok, CIRAD (France)

Mr J. M. Garcia Alvarez Coque, University of Valencia (Spain)

Ms C. Grillone, FAO Consultant (Italy)

Mr K. Hassanein, ENAL (Egypt)

Mr F. Lancon, CIRAD (France)

Mr M. Metz, FAO Consultant (Germany)

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

Mr L. Salvatici, University of Rome (Italy)

Mr F. Viciani, NAPC Scientific Committee Member (Italy)

Mr H. Wattenbach, FAO Consultant (Germany)

# Regional Workshop

## on Institution Building for Agricultural Policies in the Near East

Under the auspices of the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform of Syria, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the National Agricultural Policy Center (NAPC) have jointly organized a *Regional Workshop on Institution Building for Agricultural Policies in the Near East* on 6 and 7 December 2003 at Cham Palace in Damascus. The Workshop aimed at enhancing the knowledge of participating institutions on the conditions for adequate technical and institutional capacity development for agricultural policy work, disseminating information about the different possibilities of addressing policy analysis requirements, identifying needs for and ways of improving existing situations and practices and, finally, facilitating regional and international cooperation in this regard.

The Workshop was opened by H.E. Adel Safar, Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, H.E. Laura Mirachian, Ambassador of Italy to Syria, and H.E. Mahmood Taher, FAO Representative in Syria. It was attended by twenty-two delegates from fifteen countries of the Region, comprising Afghanistan, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen. Twelve representatives from intergovernmental organizations, including the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, the Centre International des Hautes Etudes Agronomiques Méditerranéennes (CIHEAM) of Bari, the Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD), the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) participated as well, in addition to the FAO.

The Workshop has been an occasion to share experiences and views on the challenges being faced by countries of the Near East Region in achieving the goals of sustainable rural and agricultural development. Although many policy reforms have been carried out with positive results, the need remains for promoting institutional and technical capacities in formulating, analyzing, adjusting and monitoring policies for agricultural and rural development within the context of changing domestic and international environments.

The inaugural ceremony was followed by the presentation of

a study on "Food and Agricultural Policies in the Near East", coordinated by Mr Abdou, Chief of the Policy Assistance Branch at the FAO Regional Office for the Near East in Cairo. The document served as a reference framework for the discussion of the successive keynote paper "Institutional Capacity Development for Food and Agricultural Policies: Requirements and Approaches", conducted by the FAO consultant Mr Luca Salvatici, Professor of Agricultural and Resource Economics at Molise University, and Ms Maria Grazia Quietì, Senior Agricultural Policy Support Officer at the FAO Headquarter in Rome.



*The Workshop has been an occasion to share experiences and views on the need for establishing specialized institutions for agricultural policies in the Near East*

The participants were then invited to visit the NAPC premises where they were briefed on the Center's experience and achievements, result of several years of fruitful cooperation between Italy and Syria through the Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA implemented by the FAO. The NAPC and Project staff, represented by Mr Atieh El Hindi, Director of the NAPC, and Mr Ciro Fiorillo, Chief Technical Adviser of the Project, illustrated the Syrian experience in building a specialized institution for agricultural policy work, its day-to-day operation as well as its most recent publications and gave them an overview of its history and future perspectives.

The participants referred their own experiences and made recommendations on desirable actions and programmes to be undertaken at the national, regional and international levels, such as continuing to share experiences, promoting exchange of technical experts among countries with similar interests and problems, and, finally, networking academic and research institutes with public sector institutions working in agriculture and rural development in the region. They shared the views that natural resources management, increased investments in agriculture, rural poverty reduction, food security and participation in trade negotiations are critical policy domains for which well functioning policy institutions and capable policy analysts are required. Developing the capacities for formulating, analysing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies is considered a fundamental factor.

The participants agreed to follow-up the exchange of experiences and collaboration in the near future through the newly established Near East and North Africa Regional Network for Agricultural Policies (NENARNAP), promoted by the FAO.

# Syrian Agricultural Trade

*“Syrian Agricultural Trade”*

*illustrates the evolution of world and Syrian trade*

*in line with the increasing economic and social interdependency*

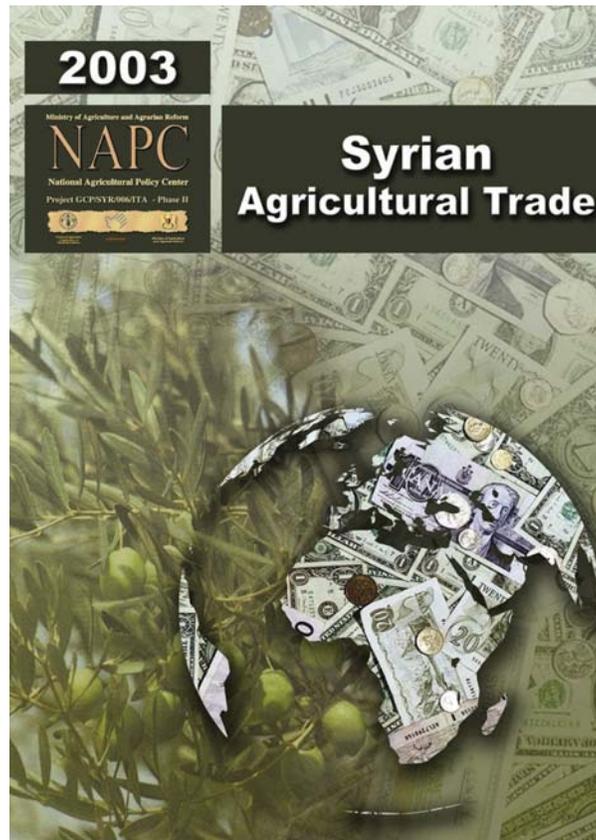
*brought about by global market liberalization*

In the late 1990s, Syria has started modifying its trade policies toward liberalization and, thus, more compliance with international trade rules in order to enhance the private sector role in a wider range of economic activities. The most important recent modifications in Syrian policies have been: the unification of the exchange rate brought closer to the equilibrium price, the establishment of the currency and credit council, the legislation on the establishment of private and joint sector banks and, finally, the adoption and application of the Harmonized System for tariffs.

SAT 2003 intends to be a source of information and a tool for decision makers to consolidate Syria's internal reform process, increase its outward orientation, build up a network of bilateral and multilateral agreements, promote trade liberalization and, thus, accelerate the country's economic development

The first two chapters focus on general and agricultural world trade and related policies, hinting at the

## *The most important recent modifications in Syrian policies*



## *A special chapter is devoted to the rules governing accession to the WTO*

experience of the EU and the USA. The third chapter analyzes Syrian agro-food trade trends in the light of three main key dimensions: time, space and product. It also identifies the country's new agricultural trade partners and traces a classification of the most suitable products for export. The report also provides variables and indicators allowing to assess the adaptation of Syrian products to world demand changes and to measure the degree of exports diversification. The fourth chapter reviews recent changes in institutions and policies as well as negotiation and implementation of preferential agreements of relevance for agricultural trade.

A special chapter is devoted to the description of the rules governing the accession process to the WTO. This information is meant to provide technical background to Syria's request of adhesion to the organization and to be functional to a further progression of the country's integration into the global trading system.

# Agricultural Policy Forum

## Great Arab Free Trade Area: Impact on Arab Economies

On 22 October 2003 Mr Mohammed Bashir Al Abrash, Director of the Fiscal and Monetary Planning Department in the State Planning Commission, presented this seminar. He described the Great Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) Agreement, gave an overview of the situation preceding its establishment, and illustrated the implementation constraints of the agreement. Finally, some recommendations on possible ways to improve the performance of GAFTA were formulated.

Mr Al Abrash started with highlighting the importance of economic activities in promoting social and political convergence.

Moreover, the lecturer explained the situation preceding the establishment of GAFTA, by presenting a historical excursus of the most relevant attempts to achieve Arab economic integration.



He mentioned how, despite the numerous efforts to engage into different forms of regional economic integration, inter-Arab trade has been lagging behind. The formation of a regional trading block, resulting from the effective implementation of trade agreements, is still at an early stage. Empirical evidence showed in fact that the impact of formal settlements on Arab regional trade liberalization has been extremely limited.

Finally, many factors were presented to explain the weakness of inter-Arab trade and the failure of previous regional agreements to stimulate trade among Arab Countries. Among these, the main economic constraints were identified as follows: difference in economic regulations, similarity of production structure and traded goods, lack of adequate transportation infrastructure compounded by distance, overprotection, heavy reliance on trade taxes, lack of market information and poor competitiveness of products.



## Food Security and Development

On 29 January 2004, Mr Franco Viciani, FAO Consultant, delivered a seminar on "Food Security and Development". He started his presentation providing the audience with the 1996 World Food Summit (WFS) definition of food security described as the condition subsisting "when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life." He also reported about the WFS commitment to halve the number of undernourished (800 million, 1996 FAO estimate) by 2015. In this regard, he documented that progress in reducing undernourishment has reversed and reaffirmed the call of UN for countries and governments to reinforce their endeavors in fighting hunger. In addition, he explained the effects of food insecurity on development such as: reduced working capacity, vulnerability to illness and inability to invest, ending up in a final negative impact on overall macroeconomic performance.

Furthermore, the lecturer introduced the relation between food security and development. He referred to Dudley Seers' mid 1970's consideration on the unfeasibility of development if, alongside with economic growth, there is no reduction of poverty, inequality and unemployment. In this context he explained the effects of food insecurity and malnutrition on development and the effects of development on food security also providing an excursus on the evolution of the two notions.

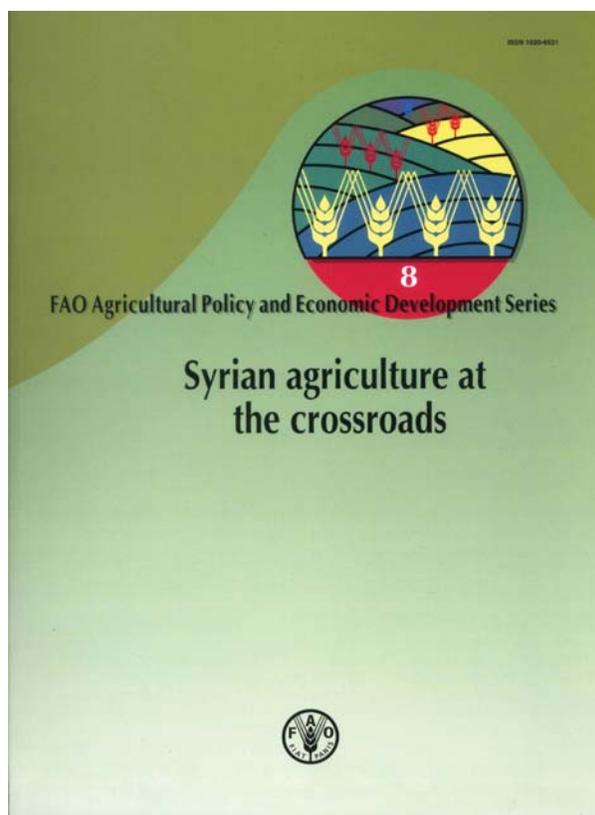
Mr Viciani described the steps leading to the formulation of appropriate food security policies referring first to the need to identify the dimensions, characteristics and location (geographical and social) of poverty and undernourishment and then analyzing the factors that contribute to the generation, permanence and aggravation of poverty and food insecurity.

In concluding the seminar, Mr Viciani indicated that FAO has recently launched a "twin-track approach" which combines the promotion of broad-based sustainable agricultural and rural development with targeted nutrition interventions.

# Syrian Agriculture at the Crossroads

## *"Syrian Agriculture at the Crossroads": past and current Syrian agricultural policies*

Syrian Agriculture at the Crossroads constitutes one of the main outcomes of the long term collaboration among FAO, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Italian Government.



The book summarizes a set of studies conducted by a panel of high level international and national experts within the first phase of the FAO Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA funded by the Italian Government with the objective of establishing the National Agricultural Policy Center (NAPC). Indeed, while training the cadre and designing the institutional setting for the NAPC, the Project supplied international expertise to conduct a series of studies covering the main aspects of Syrian agriculture with a threefold objective: providing a systematic overview of main agricultural issues in order to identify feasible policy options; contributing to the elaboration of a proposal for an Agricultural Development Strategy for the Syrian Arab Republic; and enhancing

capacity development by promoting the collaboration between national and international experts.

Syrian agricultural policies are reviewed throughout the book, which analyzes the conditions that have permitted substantial achievements in terms of food security and inter sectoral equity, and underlines the challenges the country is now facing in consideration of its fast growing population. Moreover, it addresses the new policy needed to adapt to a progressively liberalized economy, as exemplified by the decision of the Syrian Arab Republic to request admission to the World Trade Organization, while preserving the positive social features inherited from the sector's history.

### *The book summarizes a set of studies conducted by a panel of international and national experts within the first phase of the FAO Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA*

This publication includes three main parts. Part One illustrates the conditions and contribution of the agricultural sector in the national economy. Part Two analyzes the economics of the main sub-sectors in agriculture; the "strategic crops" under Government planning and other important sub-sectors; processing and marketing, with particular reference to the dairy and horticulture sub sectors. Part Three examines the structural and institutional factors determining the availability and use patterns of the production factors and inputs for agriculture production: the diversity of agriculture producers, land tenure and labour relations, irrigation water policies, inputs and credit supply and distribution systems.

The book acknowledges that the reforms initiated more than a decade ago have been conducted cautiously, thereby avoiding the economic and social disruptions that have caused great losses and suffering in many other countries. It concludes that such reforms should be pursued preserving past achievements such as nutritional levels comparable to those of rich countries and equity in income levels between rural and urban populations.

# Flash News



## **Tripartite Review of the Project: GCP/SYR/006/ITA**

The representatives of FAO, Italy and Syria, during the Tripartite Review mission held from 8 to 10 December 2003, reviewed the Project's achievements and results and drew lessons and recommendations for a fruitful continuation of activities under phases II and III of the Project. The TR commended the achievements of the Project, owed to its sound design, management and monitoring, and to the remarkable commitment of and co-operation among the three parties concerned as well as the NACP and Project staff.

## **GCP Graduation Ceremony**

A graduation ceremony was held in the NACP conference room on 11 December 2003 in order to crown the successful completion of the training program delivered under Project GCP/SYR/006/ITA. On this occasion the certificates of attendance were handed in to the trainees at the presence of H.E. M. Taher, FAO Representative in Syria, Mr A. El Hindi, NACP Director, Mr C. Fiorillo, Project CTA, Ms M.G. Quieti, FAO Senior Policy Support Officer and Mr J. Vercueil, Senior Project Advisor of the Project, along with Mr M. Gorgoni, expert of the Italian Cooperation.



## **Scientific Committee Meeting**

The NACP Scientific Committee held its fourth meeting from 25 to 29 January 2004 to discuss and approve the NACP Progress Report for the period June–December 2003, the 2004 Work Plan as well as the Medium Term Work Plan for the years 2004-2007.

## **Steering Commission Meeting**

The NACP Steering Commission, chaired by Mr N. Rasheed Mohammed, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform, and composed of representatives of other ministries, endorsed the NACP Work Plan for 2004, and the Medium Term Work Plan 2004-2007 during its fourth meeting held on 1 March 2004.



## **NACP Library Development**

In order to further develop the collection and services of the NACP library, Mr M.K. Hassanein, Director of the Egyptian National Agricultural Library and FAO international consultant, visited the Center for two weeks in February. During the visit, the expert assessed current status of the library identifying actions needed in order to enrich its endowment and strengthen its role as a main resource for Syrian agricultural policy analysis. On this occasion, the Library Committee has been trained in catalogue building, publications classification and dissemination, and information searching.

## **Six NACP Staff in France**

In February, six NACP staff conducted a two-week internship at the Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD) in France, as part of the study on "Systematic Analysis of the Comparative Advantage of Syrian Agricultural Products" carried out by the NACP in cooperation with CIRAD.

---

---

### **National Agricultural Policy Center**

**Airport Highway, Third Bridge - P O BOX 4251- Damascus, Syria**

**Phone 011 542 1547 - Fax 011 542 1702**

**Email [faop@net.sy](mailto:faop@net.sy)**

**Statistical Database: [http://faostat.fao.org:8090/caf/syrd\\_b\\_default.htm](http://faostat.fao.org:8090/caf/syrd_b_default.htm)**

**Project Website: [www.fao.org/decentralizedoffices/syria/GCPITA/index\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/decentralizedoffices/syria/GCPITA/index_en.htm)**