

## The role of the agricultural sector in promoting economic growth and the need to maintain it



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The agricultural sector plays a pivotal role in Jordan's economic development. Recent economic growth data from the first, second, and third quarters of last year demonstrate a significant contribution of agriculture to the national GDP, with figures reaching 8.1%, 8.6%, and 6.3%, respectively. Notably, the sector's contribution to the overall economic growth rate, which was approximately 2.8%, amounted to 0.3%, a figure that has not been observed in previous years.

This notable increase in the agricultural sector's contribution is attributed to multiple factors. Among these, the growth in exports, particularly to the Syrian market, has had a considerable impact. The sector's diversification of agricultural products and the adoption of modern agricultural technologies have further propelled its expansion. Additionally, the area of irrigated agricultural land has seen substantial growth, supporting higher productivity and produce.

Data reveal that the extent of irrigated agricultural land expanded from 350,000 dunams in 2005 to 465,000 dunams by 2023. In contrast, the area dedicated to sustainable rain-fed tree crops declined from 500,000 to 380,000 dunams, while rain-fed field crops decreased from 1,250,000 to 750,000 dunams over the same period. The reduction in rain-fed agriculture is linked to several factors, including unregulated urbanization, lower field crop prices due to regional competition, and the adverse effects of climate change. These factors are expected to further reduce the area of rain-fed crops, potentially halving it by the middle of this century. Models from international institutions engaged in the agricultural sector underscore the urgent need to accelerate climate mitigation and adaptation measures. Seasonal rainfall rates are declining annually by 0.4 to 0.6 mm across the Kingdom, posing significant risks.

Addressing these challenges requires nature-based solutions and the incorporation of national climate change adaptation programs to protect the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of farmers working in the sector.

Looking ahead, the irrigated agricultural area is projected to expand further as new wells are licensed. However, Jordan faces major water challenges, being one of the world's poorest countries in terms of annual renewable water availability per capita. This reality demands careful preservation of agricultural investments and enhanced sustainability, especially in the face of declining rainfall, excessive groundwater use, and the complexities of shared water resources with neighboring countries. Additionally, it is vital to avoid production surpluses that could depress prices and threaten the sustainability of farmers, particularly smallholders. To overcome these challenges, several strategic areas must be addressed. These include improving the collection, management, and dissemination of agricultural and climate data to farmers, fostering ongoing awareness, and supporting the adoption of smart technologies.

such as precision agriculture and smart irrigation systems. Such innovations can enhance the efficiency of water and fertilizer use while boosting productivity.

Greater focus must be directed toward increasing the cultivation of high-yield crops, implementing robust water harvesting strategies at the farm level, and broadening the application of reclaimed water for restricted agricultural purposes. These initiatives, along with other targeted programs, are critical for maintaining the sector's resilience, as highlighted by support from the Economic Modernization Vision.

Protecting farmers' investments and livelihoods must remain a national priority, as agriculture and food security highly supported by His Majesty the King, directly influencing the food and water security of all Jordanians. These efforts are crucial for safeguarding low-income populations from rising prices and ensuring the continued prosperity and sustainability of the agricultural sector.