

# Agriculture Man Landscape



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Detail from a painting by Michael Kovner 'Zivoniut' (oil on canvas)

## **Foreword**

When thinking about Israel, agricultural and rustic landscapes immediately come to mind: plowed furrows as far as the eye can see, snowy white cotton fields, green orchards dotted with orange, grey-green olive trees emerging from between a mixture of ancient and modern terraces, a water tower rising above the rooftops. All these images from the land's past, through a history brimming with vicissitudes, bring us to today's emerging, rejuvenated landscape.

The combination of the agricultural, natural and urban landscapes shapes Israel's character. The urban landscape demonstrates man's influence, while in the natural landscape we can discern the work of the heavens. The agricultural landscape integrates the two; for this exact reason it is so varied and of such great interest and importance. Yet at the same time it presents us with a significant challenge.

The goal of this project is to paint a picture of Israel's agricultural landscapes. It details the values of agriculture – in terms of landscape, culture, heritage and environment; highlights the similarities and differences between agricultural landscapes in various areas of the country; assesses their sensitivity and vulnerability; and, in so doing, presents methods for nurturing and conserving them.

The attention that this study devotes to the topic of agricultural landscapes in Israel is of great significance, in particular because their continued existence must not be taken for granted. There is increasing demand to allocate open spaces as lands for development and construction; a substantial proportion of this is directed at agricultural lands. If the importance and value of the agricultural landscape's contribution to society, and to the landscape of the country as a whole, is not recognized, this continued demand for development will lead to its destruction.

This project seeks to lay the foundations for a public discussion of the meaning and importance of agriculture in the Israeli dialogue. The shining light of agriculture as a founding principle of the return to Zion – Jewish renewal and settlement in the land of Israel – has dulled, and today the sector plays other roles. This is consistent with the concept of sustainable agriculture, according to which agriculture does not close itself off within the four walls of economic utility but rather takes upon itself additional functions, including construction of the country's character, landscape and heritage.

## **Introduction**

Many parties share an interest in the process of change which Israeli agriculture is currently undergoing: the agricultural establishment, farmers themselves, the planning community and the general public. As an economic sector and as a food producer, agriculture is today less reliant upon land resources, yet at the same time the significance of its external contribution to the values of landscape, culture and heritage is increasing. Agriculture plays a role in environmental conservation and ecological processes, in addition to providing green breathing space in a country which is becoming continuously more crowded and developed. While agriculture once formed the cornerstone of the Zionist movement, it today stands before a crossroads, at the heart of which lies the significant change in perspective that has occurred in recent years.

This change, which today has reached new heights, necessitates preparation and innovative thinking regarding the meaning and functions of "landscape and environmental agriculture". In contrast to the traditional value of agriculture – food production – which was analyzed using agro-technical and economic tools, and which we were able to rationalize, measure, quantify and justify, agriculture's contribution to the landscape, aesthetics and culture require totally different methods of examination: landscape analysis, environmental design, understanding of its significance to culture and heritage and its significance for recreational services, vacations in natural surroundings, tourism and so forth. The picture becomes even more complex as a result of the demand for the integration of all these elements within the accepted agricultural-economic system. Indeed, "landscape agriculture" must continue to include all the traditional aspects of agriculture surrounding food production. Despite the general agreement concerning the need to combine the economic and social functions of agriculture, until now insufficient attention has been paid to preparing for this new reality.

What is "landscape agriculture"? Which agricultural landscapes do we want to see, and moreover who will look at, examine and decide upon the character of the landscape? Should these be traditional agricultural landscapes, similar to those found in pilgrims' descriptions of their journeys to the land of Israel and in classic portraits of the holy land that attempt to recreate the landscapes of the Biblical land which formed the backdrop for the stories and events related in the Book of Books? Or perhaps they should be those of the first days of the return to Zion – a wheat field stretching as far as the eye can see, vineyards, the orchards of the Sharon region, a water tower rising above the rooftops?

A further question concerns the impressions made on the agricultural landscape by the many nations that have lived in the land of Israel alongside the Jewish people: the Nabateans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Bedouins, Druze, Templers, Circassians and many others. Each of these peoples left its mark on the agricultural landscape of the country, and each one's unique activities shaped the landscape in a particular manner. The impact of traditional agriculture can be discerned in olive groves and orchards, in stone terraces, fields watered by rain or irrigation, in the landscapes of the Galilee, Samaria, Judah and the Negev.

The imprint of modern agriculture on the country's landscape is continuously increasing. A long plowed furrow stretching off into the horizon, fields of cotton or sunflowers, large wide terraces replacing ancient ones, greenhouses and nettings, chicken coops and cowsheds, are all, of course, agricultural facilities. What is the difference between these and classic, accepted agricultural structures such as guard huts, wine and olive oil presses?

The desire to reflect the country's character through its agricultural landscape raises serious questions in the minds of planners, landscape architects and farmers, and occasionally these also reach the public agenda. Yet until now they have not been consolidated, properly phrased or clearly posed. These questions are becoming ever more significant as a result of the continuously growing pressure – which will only increase further in the future – to allocate agricultural lands for development.

The present study, rather than presuming to provide answers to these questions seeks to highlight their importance, clarify them and discuss their components. In so doing, it aims to give substance to and anchor in reality the relationship between the concepts of man, agriculture and landscape.

There is no one right answer to questions regarding the "character of the agricultural landscape", its nature, design and style. Moreover, it is likely that a multitude of opinions and perspectives will lead to varied and rich results. This study does not intend to hammer in nails and set out fixed and uniform outlines for the landscape. Rather, it intends to lay the foundations for documenting, sketching and analyzing the units and formations of agricultural landscapes. It attempts to recognize and characterize landscapes typical of different areas and which reflect the various historical periods and agricultural cultures that have existed in the country. All this should serve the planning system as a basis for formulating suitable policy and making decisions concerning agricultural lands in Israel.

The landscape is not fixed and unchanging, and this study does not aim to perpetuate frozen landscape patterns. The landscape, and principally the agricultural landscape, is the work of man and as such is subject to changes – it will alter in the future according to developments and advances in methods of cultivation and farming, as well as according to economic and agro-technical conditions.

The agricultural landscape strengthens, and indeed creates, the spirit of the place. This fact forms the basis for developing a framework for consistent decision-making regarding the care of agricultural landscapes and suiting them to different regions, and for giving substance to the renewal of Israeli agriculture.

## **General Background**

Israeli agriculture has for some time been in a state of continued crisis. The desire to provide agriculture in Israel with a new face, image and substance cannot be isolated from the foundations and roots of this agriculture in the Israeli experience, as it has been nurtured and has flourished from the first days of the return to the land of Israel to the present day.

The fortunes of agriculture in Israel have taken a turn for the worse and its initial status and composition have not supported it in the current, difficult period. The brilliance of the meanings, images and roles that were considered so important in earlier times, and which were carefully, even zealously, cultivated and preserved, has dulled and today these factors no longer carry weight in the arguments to justify the existence of agriculture.

These matters lie at the heart of the current agricultural crisis and the difficulty in managing this crisis and protecting agriculture. The Yishuv, and later the State of Israel, maintained and nurtured agriculture as a cornerstone in the fabric of the country's physical and moral life for reasons that are no longer valid today. Agriculture is disappearing before our very eyes as these reasons for its existence and that of its fields, tools and workforce expire. The greater the severity of the need that justified the existence of agriculture in the early days of the Jewish return to the land, the larger the hole created in its absence.

Hayim Gabati begins his book *One Hundred Years of Settlement* by stating that "The history of the Jewish agricultural settlement in the land of Israel is a story that has not been told". Settlement and agricultural settlement are one and the same in Gabati's eyes: there is no settlement that is not agricultural. In this way he aptly expresses the character of the early years of the settlement, until the foundation of the State:

settlement is agricultural. Agriculture should not be viewed as a means or tool in the hands of the movement to return to Zion and renew the land. Rather, it was the embodiment of this return to Zion. The two are inextricably bound together.

Much has been said and written concerning the amazing achievement of the urban Jews who created the agricultural settlement in the land of Israel. Among the Jews in the East European Diaspora in Russia and Poland, the forefathers of the Zionist settlement in the land of Israel, there were no farmers. Yet those city dwellers came to a unanimous agreement that the settlement of the land meant tilling its soil.

"In order for us to be able to renew our life as a healthy people, a large Hebrew agricultural population in the land of Israel is crucial. And even though agriculture does not befit the structure of our people in the present time, the agricultural basis is important to us for two main reasons: a) so that the population can establish an economy reliant upon its own products and not upon imports from abroad; b) so that the nation will put down deep roots in the soil of its homeland." (Ettinger, 1945).

"The idea of the return to Zion was founded upon the principle of the return of the Jewish people to work the land. The return to Zion could only come about through the immigration of Jewish masses to the land of Israel and the establishment of agricultural villages, in which they would till the soil and grow crops, vegetables, fruits and animals. In so doing they would lay the foundations for a healthy national economy which would serve, in due course, as a basis for political independence. We must remember that most of the European population in those days was involved in working the land. Agriculture was a central and crucial economic sector. Farmers produced the food that they needed and sold the surplus to the urban population. Thus it is not surprising that the proponents of the return to Zion viewed it as a primary and principal duty to establish agricultural communes and create a class of farmers that would produce bread and the necessary food by the sweat of their brows." (Gabati, 1981).

Baron de Rothschild, patriarch of the Yishuv, clearly expresses the reasons for founding and supporting agricultural villages in the land of Israel:

"Neither your poverty nor your pressure awakened in me a desire to save you, for many are the poor and groaning as a result of the oppressor in this land [Russia], more so than you. Neither did I do this out of pity for you. Only the holy idea that you grasped at, to settle the desolate land of our fathers and to return children to their own borders. These are the reasons which roused me to support your enterprise and to make happen this thing that is holy to all of us." (Gabati, 1981).

The weakening of the agricultural sector in Israel has been evident since the 1980s. This decline has led to a lengthy process of ceasing to cultivate agricultural lands and subsequently abandoning them. At the same time, there is a growing demand for land for development purposes – mainly in the center of the country. A large proportion of the agricultural plots belonging to agricultural villages are located close to cities, and they constitute a resource for the natural development of continued urban sprawl. These two processes – the weakening of agriculture and the demand for land for development – have led to serious pressure for the re-zoning of agricultural plots and their designation for construction. To date, a significant amount of agricultural land has been removed from the cultivation cycle, and some even covered with buildings. The

decision of the Israel Land Authority to involve the owners of the land in this initiative and in the granting of development rights has sped up the processes of re-zoning and building. The change in designation from agricultural to developed land constitutes a preferred economic alternative to continued cultivation of the land. This summarizes briefly the crisis facing Israeli agriculture today.

A painful expression of this crisis and its implications is to be found in the story of a farmer from Kfar Vitkin, Bar-Kokhba Midrashi, who was forced to abandon his orchards:

"On Monday I got up and decided that I will no longer water my Valencia orange orchard. On Tuesday I visited my father's grave and asked his forgiveness for abandoning the battlefield and ceasing the realization of his Zionist dream... This is not the first orchard that I am uprooting or drying up, but this is the first one that I am drying up when it is at its best. The trees are healthy, the yield of 5 tonnes per dunam is very reasonable, the fruit is beautiful and tasty.

This Valencia orange orchard made history. It is among the first orchards planted in Kfar Vitkin on heavy soil... it took time until it gave a full yield, there were cold years when the fruit froze, there were years of disease, there were years in which the crop was smaller, but there always remained hope that next year the yield would be bigger and the price better. Now they have taken away our tomorrow. Today not only are orchards being uprooted, but the people is being uprooted from its land. An orchard can be re-planted, a people cannot." (Haaretz, 17 June 2001).

This uprooting of the orchard in Kfar Vitkin is part of a larger uprooting of the country's landscapes and their transformation into different scenes: built up and developed. It is indicative of the changes in the national mood and consciousness, and of the weakening of the link between the nation and the land.

The agricultural crisis has far-reaching implications for the ecological, social, landscape and cultural situations in the state of Israel. Aside from food production for the population, agricultural land performs other, no less important, functions.

The picture of the agricultural future is complex and varied: alongside food production and natural products, agriculture also provides an open view and green breathing spaces; it plays a role in recreation and well-being; and its open spaces break up the urban scenery. Agricultural landscapes enrich the view, with their different appearances according to the changing seasons, and they provide interesting, colorful variety close to populated areas. The Israeli public, most of which lives in cities, should receive pleasure from the cultivation of agricultural landscapes, rather than competing over them and dirtying them. Therefore the mechanisms for their protection and cultivation must become the property and responsibility of city dwellers. The burden of conserving agricultural lands should no longer be the sole responsibility of farmers but rather it should be shared with urban residents.

The present study lays the foundations for the continued existence of agriculture on the basis of international experience and analyses of similar cases which have recognized agriculture's external contribution. It seeks to provide an opening to expand public interest in agricultural landscapes in Israel, to discuss their characteristics and value, to raise suggestions or ideas and methods to preserve and cultivate these landscapes and to suit cultural-landscape agriculture to Israel's environmental conditions.



## **The Structure of the Study**

The document before us includes ideas, thoughts and courses of action regarding the future of agriculture in Israel. Many of these have become customary within the framework of research conducted by "Nekudat Hen", an agro-ecological planning organization, over the last decade.

The topic with which we are concerned – agriculture and its external contributions – lies outside the accepted frameworks of agriculture. It relates to values of culture and heritage, nature and scenery, ecology and the environment, planning and economy. The web of connections between these issues and the multitude of sectors involved necessitates order and clarity in the organization of the study's chapters. We have chosen to present three main sections:

### **Section 1 Introductions – The External Contributions of Agriculture**

The first section focuses on the roots of the problem – the agricultural crisis and, in its aftermath, the failure of the market and the loss of agriculture's external contributions. This section also provides detailed descriptions of the external contributions of agriculture, divided into three categories:

- Society, including culture, image and heritage, appearance and tourism.
- Environment, divided into ecological and environmental perspectives.
- Economics, outside the direct economic benefits of agriculture, including real estate value and land preservation

In sum, this section expresses the opinion that only sustainable agriculture is capable of maintaining these external contributions. Here the discussion turns to sustainable agriculture and the manner in which it fulfills the social and environmental demands placed upon it.

### **Section 2 Sources – The Character of the Agricultural Landscape**

This section focuses on the cultural sources of agriculture and its role in the history of the land of Israel: in praise of the country – a land flowing with milk and honey – as expressed by the sages, in depictions of Israel's agricultural landscapes and in the social, religious and cultural values of agriculture as found in our sources – Midrash and Halakha – in addition to the writings of other peoples who settled the land, traveler's accounts and more.

Following this is a short survey of the role of agricultural landscapes, types of scenery and reference to these in world literature. The section concludes with a portrait of the agricultural landscape as a source of inspiration and of a series of images and scenes common in our lives.

### **Section 3 Map of Agricultural Landscape Units in Israel**

This section constitutes the lion's share of the study. It includes two parts: The first proposes a system for typifying, classifying, documenting, sketching and evaluating agricultural landscapes in Israel. The proposal is based on methods accepted in the western world. The model utilized in this study is adapted from the experience of the British Countryside Agency.

The second part of this section describes the various agricultural units in Israel, according to the proposed outline.

## **Afterword**

One cannot discuss the question of agriculture in the land of Israel without examining the relationship between the Jewish nation and agriculture.

This chapter briefly surveys the body of interactions between the Jewish nation and agriculture. These relations have been discussed at length in different contexts – nationalistic, religious, social and economic. All of these are presented from a historical perspective along with an understanding of their significance in our time.