

should be done in conjunction with the introduction of an inexpensive, yet effective alternative to salt which controls for termites.³⁸ Otherwise, farmers will continue applying salt to their fields despite its bad effects on the soil because termites are the more immediate problem.

Labor Inputs

Next to environmental conditions, labor is the most critical input in the farming system. This input usually determines the size of the area under cultivation and, thereby, the limits of a farmer's crop production. For this reason, understanding the role of labor in the farming system is essential.³⁹

Labor is obtained from three sources. First, farmers use their own labor and the labor of their households. From the data presented earlier regarding productive members per household, this is the main source of labor for most farmers. Second, farmers will hire labor from within their own village. This labor source is especially important when time constraints are imposed on cropping activities. For instance, farmers who want to plant sesame after a rain must do so within three days.⁴⁰ Often they hire laborers from the village to help in planting. Third, farmers will hire labor from outside their village. These laborers perform some or all the agricultural operations. Some farmers prefer outside laborers because they usually will work on a particular task until it is completed. Local laborers may not always do this because they have their own fields to take care of. Various combinations of these three sources of labor are often used, depending on the availability of the labor, the monetary resources of the farmer, and the time limitations imposed by the task.

There are several types of labor arrangements. First, farmers may hire by piece work or the completion of a task for a given piece of land. The standard land unit is a mukhammas (1.73 feddans or 1.80 acres), and laborers will be paid for the number of these units they complete. For instance, a laborer will be hired to do the first weeding on a farmer's field. He will be paid a specified amount according to how many mukhammas he has weeded. Farmers usually pay by mukhammas for those operations for which time constraints are not that important. These sometimes include planting before rains (rameel), first and second weeding, and the cutting of millet and sorghum. In addition, outside labor is usually hired by mukhammas. The two reasons given by farmers for this practice are that: 1) outside laborers usually work until the job is completed; and 2) less supervision of somewhat untrustworthy laborers is required than if they were paid by the time worked.⁴¹

³⁸This could be another substance or a technique.

³⁹Not all the data collected on labor have been fully analyzed, so they will not be presented in this report. This information will be addressed in detail in our final report.

⁴⁰A common rule of thumb among farmers in this area is that crops will successfully germinate if they are planted within three days after a rain.

⁴¹There is a general mistrust of outside laborers, because farmers believe that such laborers would attempt to take advantage of a time-based wage arrangement since it is to their benefit to take longer to complete the task.