

groups in recent years as a primary source of labor. Nowadays, communal labor activities most often occur in times of extreme need, such as providing aid to a family following the death or illness of one of its members, or helping a poor farmer harvest a crop which matured too quickly and otherwise would be lost. However, communal work arrangements are still important for poor farmers in millet threshing. These farmers use communal labor for threshing because: 1) the work is too difficult for one farmer to do; 2) they usually can't afford the costs of hiring labor to thresh their crop; and 3) the timing of threshing is such that other farmers are available to help. In fact, to ensure the availability of labor farmers will often wait to thresh their millet until all other competing activities are finished. For this reason, poor farmers who use communal labor in threshing millet will not start until the end of December or even the first of January. Except for millet threshing, however, communal labor is rarely used in farm operations.

Some farmers in our sample worked for wages for other farmers; however, this pattern was not as prevalent as hiring-in. Twenty-eight percent of the farmers surveyed had worked for pay. This estimate may be too low because some farmers refused to acknowledge working for others.<sup>43</sup> Umm Ramad had the largest percentage of farmers who reported working for pay (33%), followed by El Geifil (30%), and El Kharta (20%). Only two farmers in our sample were hiring-in labor as well as hiring their labor out.

One detrimental consequence of working off the farm for pay is that the worker's own fields suffer from lack of attention. Several farmers we interviewed who worked for wages on other farmers' fields were not able to do the second weeding of their own crops. This has the effect of lowering their own production. As a result, these farmers are forced to rely on wage labor and loans from merchants year after year because they cannot sustain a livelihood from fields which receive insufficient labor input. This cyclic pattern appears typical of many poor farmers in the area. The only solution to this problem involves breaking this pattern by allowing farmers to allocate their labor to their own fields. One way of doing this is to institute programs which release farmers from the necessity of selling labor to others. Some suggestions for such programs will be discussed later in this report.

#### Labor Costs

Labor costs are an important constraint to crop production in this area. To better understand this, we calculated the average total labor cost per mukhammas to grow each of the main crops.<sup>44</sup> Bearing in mind the difficulties

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<sup>43</sup>In several cases, we discovered later that some farmers' responses were inaccurate or incomplete. This reluctance to acknowledge working for other farmers is due to a common belief that such activities reflect a person's poverty. Farmers in this area are very proud people, and want to be viewed as self-reliant rather than dependent on others.

<sup>44</sup>This calculation was made by adding up the total costs for planting, replanting, first and second weeding, cutting and threshing and dividing this total by the number of mukhammas planted in the crop.