

Appendix I. A Grass-Roots Credit and Self-Help Program

The following is a description of a self-help credit program that was initiated this year by several families in El Kharta. This program was started without any help from the Government or outside organizations. It provides an example of the ingenuity and resourcefulness of farmers in this area to create a workable credit program without outside intervention.

An extended family in El Kharta started a cooperative farm in 1981 on a ten mukhammas piece of rented land. Twenty-five men participated in this venture. The owner of the farmland was also one of the men participating.

The rented land was fallow land, so all twenty-five men got together and cleared the land collectively. After clearing, each man contributed one mid of sesame seed for planting. In addition, some of these participants contributed watermelon seeds and sorghum seeds for intercropping with the sesame. Sometime before the rains during the first of June, they all got together and planted ten mukhammas in one day. Several weeks later, they started the first weeding. Every Friday for three weeks in a row they got together and weeded this field. The following Friday, they collectively replanted the field in areas where the sesame didn't germinate. A few weeks after this, they started the second weeding and continued this for three more weeks.

When it came time for cutting the sesame, all twenty-five participants worked in the field every fourth day. It took one month to cut the field. No DDT was used around the sesame drying piles.

After allowing the sesame to dry for an adequate amount of time, the twenty-five men got together to thresh the field. Each man contributed fifty piasters to help pay for the food, coffee and tea to be consumed during the threshing period. They threshed the field in one day with eight women doing the winnowing. Each woman was paid two mids of sesame. The sorghum in the field was also threshed the same day. As for the watermelons, the participants ate these while they worked in the field and several of them took some home. The smaller watermelons that couldn't be eaten were left in the field for animal fodder.

As for output gained from this field, the group obtained fifteen sacks of sesame and one sack of sorghum for their efforts. This output was not sold until the price of sesame was at its highest. The money obtained from these sales is being kept by an elected treasurer. The money is to be used as a source of credit for the poor farmers in the group. No interest is being charged and the loans will not have to be paid back until next year after the crops have been sold. A committee of five persons will make the decisions as to who gets a loan and how much. This money is also to be used as a disaster aid fund for those suffering from fire loss or the death of a household member. The individuals we talked to who participated in this project were very enthusiastic about its success.