

Hama northern countryside

The loss of crops in 2019 as a result of bombing and invasion

The residents of Sahl al-Ghab plain in the northern countryside of Hama were eagerly awaiting the arrival of June, to harvest their crops. This year was characterized by heavy rains; a good sign for a bountiful harvest, and better than previous years where there had been less rain and weak agricultural and animal production.

The necessity of this season is apparent as it helps people meet their livelihood needs, especially in these difficult times characterized by conflict and repeated displacements, as people flee out of fear of their lives and that of their children.

While the farmers were waiting to harvest their crops, they were surprised by an increase in the frequency of shelling by warplanes, helicopters, artillery, and rockets in the area. The Sahl al-Ghab and northern Hama countryside, which were once liberated from the regime forces are now subject to invasion.

This report highlights the damage to agricultural land and the physical condition of the civilian caused by the deliberate shelling of agricultural land in Sahl al-Ghab and northern Hama countryside areas.

Sahl al Gab

Sahl al Gab is a flat and fertile geographic plain located between the mountains of Latakia in the west and the mountains of Zawya and Salhab in the east, and between the city of Jisr al-Shughour in the north and Tal Salhab in the south. This area is one of the most fertile plains in Syria, supported by the Orontes river that passes from south to north.

The agricultural area was about 150,000 dunums before the shelling began on 29 April 2019, and produced most of the wheat needs of the north. It also grows industrial crops such as cotton, sugar beet, sunflowers, and yellow corn in addition to many kinds of summer and winter vegetables. Due to fighting, the area lost 70,000 dunums, as it fell to militias aligned with the Government of Syria (GoS). Only 80,000 dunums remain.



The crops were exposed to all types of ground and air bombardment, which caused them to be severely damaged. Twenty thousand dunums of wheat crops are estimated to be affected by direct burning. The estimated production of wheat for this year according to the Directorate of Agriculture and Livestock in Hama is about 50,000 tons.

The agricultural plain possessed a wealth of animals that also feeds the liberated north of Hama with milk, dairy products, and meat. According to the Animal Wealth Department, Directorate of Agriculture of Free Hama, there are an estimated:

- Sheep: 178,350
- Goats: 12,130
- Cattle Head: 4,435

Sahl Al Gab is also considered the first and most valuable resource for fisheries in the liberated areas of Syria. Fish farming is conducted on private farms spread over 6,500 dunums, most of which are in Al-Huwaiz, Al-Hamra, Bab al-Taqa, and Qal'at al-Madiq. These areas are now completely under the control of GoS aligned militia after the recent attacks.

In this harvesting period, fish farmers have lost their farms, rendering them unemployed, thus losing all hope. Some statistics from local councils for fish farms that have been completely lost are included in the box below.

Town	Area / acres	Number of fishermen
Altwaini	250	7
Aljamasah & Jamasat Alaidat	450	21
Almuhajerin	520	45
Qal'at al-Madiq	600	49

Abu Firas, a farmer from Bab al-Taqqa village, said that the GoS completely stole the crops of the villages of Sahl al-Ghab. The owners had access to them to reap and were vulnerable to looting by the shabiha (GoS aligned militia).

Al-Huwaiz	850	37
Bab al-Taqa	380	38
Al-Hamra	100,1	65



The head of the local council of the Qarata farms confirmed that the destruction on the farms that make up the largest part of Mount Shehshbo is 100 percent; the percentage of crops that were burned by the GoS shelling (air and land) is about 90 percent, and that four villages and local councils have been occupied before by the Assad regime during the recent siege.

Northern Hama countryside

This section primarily explores the situation in the Kafr Nabouda and the villages of Mount Shehshbo, as well as Kafr Zita, Latamina, and Mork in the countryside of northern Hama.

According to Abu Nawaf, one of the farmers in the area, not all of these lands are tended for the following reasons: the proximity of the GoS army or its barriers; the displacement of the owners of these lands; reluctance to farm due to fear of crops being burned during the harvest season; or the lack of economic capacity to enable them to cultivate them, especially with the high costs of agricultural tools.

Kafr Nabouda and the villages of Mount

Shehshbo:

The residential areas consist mainly of Kafr Naboudah and the villages of Jabriya, Tal Hawash, Al-Humayrat, Al-Haradana, Sahab, Qaratah, and Karouti.

Agricultural land in this area is about 70,000 to 72,000 dunums, and specific areas planted with wheat and barley are approximately 38,000 to 40,000 dunums. The land cultivated with potatoes amounts to about 14,000 to 15,000 thousand dunums, while there are about 10,000 to 11,000 thousand dunums planted with onions and garlic.

More than 90 percent of Kafr Nabouda and all nearby villages have been damaged and have become uninhabitable due to the destruction of houses. More than 70 percent of them have been destroyed by heavy shelling. GoS forces occupied many of the houses during the recent attack, when the army took control of Kafr Nabouda and four other villages (Jabriya, Tal Hawash, Al-Humayrat, Al-Haradana).

Kafr Zita, Latamina, Mork and the surrounding villages:

These include the villages of Al-Hamamiyat, Al-Sakhr, Al-Jaysat, Al-Sayyad, Latamina, and Al-Zakat. The area of agricultural land in this region is about 148,000 to 150,000 thousand dunums, according to estimates by local councils.



Mork and Kafr Zita have large areas of pistachio, olive, and other crops grown in the Mediterranean basin. The area of pistachio trees in this region is about 38,000 to 40,000 dunums. Wheat, barley, cumin, and black beans are at the forefront of cultivation in areas between 46,000 and 50,000 dunums. Potatoes and the other crops have an estimated area of about 28,000 to 30,000 dunums.

It is worth mentioning that large areas of vineyards, olives, and pistachios have been burned or damaged due to continuous shelling, particularly in Kafr Zita and Latamina, which are the two cities most targeted by the GoS.

People continue to suffer because they cannot use their agricultural lands or harvest their crops as airstrikes do not differentiate between civilians or military targets; this is tragic because pistachio season is coming, and many residents rely on the sale of pistachios to sustain their basic needs.

According to a member of the statistics office in the city of Kafr Zita, 5,000 dunums of grain were burned as a result of the shelling. He said that while there was severe damage to pistachio and olive trees, a proper census is impossible due to the frequent shelling on agricultural land.

Recommendation:

- 1- Call on the UN Security Council, the United Nations, and international bodies to intervene immediately to stop this blatant attack, which aims to weaken the region economically, and forcibly displace its people, which is a war crime under international law.
- 2- Request international organizations and stakeholders to compensate those affected by systematic and repeated targeting of population, infrastructure, and facilities.
- 3- The UN Security Council and the concerned parties should work to stop all forms of systematic economic damage conducted by the GoS and pressure the GoS to return the areas it occupied during the recent campaign.
- 4- We reaffirm the urgent need to implement international resolutions, particularly UNSC Resolution 2254, to end the suffering of the Syrian people and to stop all violations against them.