

STATE OF ISRAEL

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE
EXTENSION SERVICE
FIELD CROPS DEPARTMENT
Ref.35/24

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Mr. V.E. Richard Baravalle
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Dear sir,

I received your letter of May 12, in which you asked for some data about barley. It is a real coincidence that recently I have been receiving two other letters from different countries, all dealing with the same subject. Well, first of all, I want to give you some general information about barley growing today in our country, which may be used as a background for better understanding. As a matter of fact, barley has been diminishing steadily in our country for the last 10-15 years and covers today no more than approximately 10% of the total small grain production. This trend is due to the much lower prices for barley in comparison with wheat prices, whereas the yields of both grains are more or less at the same level. The main region for barley growing is in the Negeb (South) between Beer Shebah and the Gaza strip. In the Jordan Valley there is hardly any barley left today. Among the Arab farmers in the vicinity of Jericho, there can still be found some small patches of barley.

This year was a very exceptional one, from climatic point of view. We have had an extreme wet and cold winter and therefore there was a great delay in the ripening of wheat and barley. Both are sown as a rule in, November and the harvest starts around the end of April - the beginning of May. As stated, this year, the first wheat and barley have been harvested not before mid-May in the Jordan Valley. However, it is not right of course to make a comparison between today and the Ancient times, not as far as concerns the variety of barley and not the way of harvesting. Today we have to wait with the harvest until the grain is entirely dry which means a moisture content of 12-13% only. Otherwise, the mechanical harvester does not perform a clean threshing and the grain cannot be stored without further drying. In Ancient times and even today with primitive methods, the barley and Wheat were harvested with a sickle and left on the land in sheaves for further drying. Therefore the crop could be harvested a couple of weeks earlier even if the barley would have been harvested with 20% moisture content. As you probably may know, at the Passover, the first omer of barley was brought as a sacrifice to the Temple and before this day, the new barley was not allowed to be consumed neither by the animals. New wheat was not allowed to be consumed before Pentecost or at least as long as old wheat was still available. In the Talmud, it is mentioned that there were years that the barley was not yet ripe at Passover. In order to be able to bring the omer sacrifice of barley in time to the Temple, they used to sow barley upon some flat roofs in the Jericho valley, which would be ready and apt to the Sacrifice on the Passover. The Omer is not a big quantity of grain. I guess that this rather extended answer will satisfy you but in case there is still any information required, don't hesitate to write again.

Yours sincerely

M. Bar-Droma
Director Field Crops Dept.