

Turkish Farmers See Poverty in Ban on the Poppy



A girl in a poppy field in Turkey's Afyon Province. Opium oozes from pods of the plant, which has many uses. The New York Times/M. A. Kislali

By HENRY KAMM
Special to The New York Times

ATLIHISAR, Turkey, Oct. 1 —The lovely poppy with the white or purple blossoms is their staff of life, as the villagers of this impoverished region of the central Anatolian highlands tell it, and every bit of it is put to good use.

The delicate leaves of the young plant make a delicious salad: its seeds provide not

only the oil with which the salad is dressed but also the bulk of the fat in the villagers' diet. The seeds or other parts of the plant also make feed for cattle, bread, furniture, firewood and pharmaceuticals.

But the flower's greatest cash value oozes in a milky sap from the pods that turns black as it dries: it is the raw opium from which is made most of the heroin used in

the United States. Under strong American persuasion, Turkey decided last year to ban all growing of poppies on Aug. 31, with this year's harvest.

Banning the opium crop in Turkey, however, is not expected to end the production of heroin. A recent study warned that while Turkey was the primary source of the traffic entering the United States, two secondary

sources—Southeast Asia and Southern Asia—had "potential for becoming important suppliers of opium for the international heroin market in the future, particularly as the primary complex falters."

"We heard that our opium becomes heroin and kills all the Americans," said Huseyin Okumus, mukhtar, or chief, of this village. "They are

Continued on Page 12, Column 3

The New York Times

Published: October 3, 1972

Copyright © The New York Times

Farmers in Turkey Foresee Poverty in Country's Ban on Poppy Growing

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

rich and that is why they are using it. Their richness kills them and leaves us poor."

The mukhtar said—and most of the men of the village sitting around him in front of the coffeehouse off the muddy main square agreed volubly — that opium was the largest single source of income of every one here and indeed in the whole province, whose name means "opium."

"The plants would be this high now," said a man holding his hand a few inches off the ground, "but we have planted nothing because nothing we know can take the place of opium."

Another man added that on his 30 donums of land—about seven acres—only five were usually planted in opium, which takes much labor to cultivate and harvest, and the five always produced as much income as the 25 remaining.

They said that now the illegal trade in opium was over, at least for the growers, they did not mind admitting that they had always sold to traffickers as well as to the Government purchasing organization, to which they should have sold all their production.

"One third," was the mukhtar's answer when asked how much of their yield went into the black market.

"Who knows how much a thief steals?" said Mevlut Tekin, a 25-year-old farmer.

'He Has to Sell'

None of the 30 or so villagers, nor any of those from neighboring villages who joined in the relaxed chat, exempted himself from the general admission of illegal traffic in narcotics.

"Not everybody, but most," said the mukhtar, an elected official when asked whether all farmers broke the law. He added:

"He needs a suit, his wife needs a dress. He has no income. He has to sell."

The annual per capita income in Turkey is \$350, and this region is poorer than average. The yearly income of a farm family is believed unlikely to exceed \$500.

An informed guess is that no farmer would have more than 10 kilograms—22 pounds—of opium to sell, and most would have much less.

They said that at last

year's prices, 10 kilograms would bring \$128 at the legal price and \$357 when sold to a smuggler's agent. The villagers looked incredulous when told that it would be worth 1,000 times that when turned into heroin and sold on the streets of New York.

The Buyer's Method

As the villagers related it, the illegal buyer, or "commissioner," would park his car or truck near the village and send word to a village contact to tell his neighbors that he was there to buy "black sheep" at a price he indicated. Then he would wait for sellers.

Before long his messenger would arrive with the product he had collected from his neighbors or, if the farmers' faith was less than complete, they would come themselves. The black balls of gum would be put on the commissioner's scale and the cash handed over.

"Of course we often stuffed the balls with raisins, dried prunes or dung," said Ali Kayran, an elderly man from a neighboring village, and everyone laughed.

He said that a man once filled his sack with small melons and told the commissioner that the gendarmes were coming and he had better hurry up. The commissioner paid 500 lira—\$35—for a kilogram of melons and drove off.

When the laughter had subsided, Mr. Kayran added dryly, "Next time he came he paid everybody in false 500-lira bills and got even."

Although the United States pledged \$15-million to Turkey to compensate farmers for lost production and \$20-

million to create alternate sources of income, the villagers here have not yet seen the results.

Because they have just sold their last opium crop, compensation will not be paid until the next harvest would have gone to market. The alternate sources of income are still plans contained in two volumes of joint Turkish-American project and feasibility studies under debate within a Turkish inter-agency committee.

"No one has yet told us what else to do," an old man said, "and here opium is impossible to replace."

What is left of the seeds after the oil is pressed from them feeds their cattle. It makes the milk so rich, the farmers say, that the boiled and sweetened cream of Afyon Province is a delicacy prized and highly paid for throughout Turkey.

The seeds are also baked into a crusty bread, which is spread with a grainy paste made of the sweetened seeds, and into cakes. Housewives decorate the cakes with pretty designs made by stamping the crowns of the dried seed pods into the dough.

The dried pods are bought by Dutch and French concerns for the extraction of pharmaceuticals; afterward, the crushed straw is pressed into fiberboard for the manufacture of furniture.

And the stalks that are left in the fields after the pods are cut kindle the fires sustained by dried cattle dung that heat the houses in these villages, where the rude winter with its heavy snow may arrive later this month.

In this region, wheat and

barley are the other most common crops. A hectare — 2.471 acres— of wheat yields a gross return of \$70, barley \$65, opium at the legal price about \$400.

"This crop came from the

fathers and the fathers' great-grandfathers," the old man said. "It is the best crop. It is the experience of the centuries."

"The Americans are putting us in a bad position because

they take away our good crop," the mukhtar said. "The Americans use it and they die. They must not use it like that. We produce it and don't use it. Don't they have brains?"