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**АРАБ ӨЛКӨЛӨРҮНДӨГҮ АЗЫК-ТҮЛҮК КООПСУЗДУГУ ЖАНА СОЦИАЛДЫК-
ЭКОНОМИКАЛЫК ӨНҮГҮҮ ОРТОСУНДАГЫ ӨЗ АРА АРАКЕТТЕШТИК ИЗИЛДӨӨСҮ**

**ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ВЗАИМОДЕЙСТВИЯ МЕЖДУ ПРОДОВОЛЬСТВЕННОЙ БЕЗОПАСНОСТЬЮ
И СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИМ РАЗВИТИЕМ В АРАБСКИХ СТРАНАХ**

**RESEARCH ON THE INTERACTION BETWEEN FOOD SECURITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT IN ARAB COUNTRIES**

Кыскача мүнөздөмө: Азык-түлүк коопсуздугу - араб өлкөлөрүнө көп жылдар бою тоскоол болуп келген маселе, ал географиялык абал, климат жана суу ресурстарынын жетишсиздиги сыяктуу факторлор менен шартталат. Араб өлкөлөрүнүн көбү чөлдөрдөн турат, айдоо жерлери аз, кээ бир өлкөлөрдө улануучу кагылышуулар айыл чарбасынын өнүгүшүн чектейт. Азык-түлүктүн өзүн-өзү камсыз кылуунун жетишсиздиги жана импортко көз карандылык араб өлкөлөрүндөгү азык-түлүк коопсуздугунун сезгичтигин ого бетер күчөтөт. Ошол эле учурда, азык-түлүк коопсуздугу жана социалдык-экономикалык өнүгүү бири-бирине байланыштуу жана өз ара таасир этет. Азык-түлүк коопсуздугу мамлекеттин туруктуулугу жана коомдук өнүгүүнүн негизи болуп саналат, ал эми азык-түлүк коопсуздугун колдоочу экономикалык саясат аны бекемдөөдө чоң роль ойнойт.

Аннотация: Продовольственная безопасность представляет собой долгосрочную проблему для арабских стран, обусловленную такими факторами, как географическое положение, климат и нехватка водных ресурсов. Большинство арабских стран имеют преимущественно пустынные территории с небольшой долей пахотных земель, а в некоторых странах продолжающиеся конфликты серьезно ограничивают развитие сельского хозяйства. Недостаточная самообеспеченность продовольствием и высокая зависимость от импорта еще больше усугубляют уязвимость продовольственной безопасности в арабских странах. В то же время продовольственная безопасность и социально-экономическое развитие взаимосвязаны и влияют друг на друга. Продовольственная безопасность является основой стабильности государства и социального развития, а экономическая политика, поддерживающая продовольственную безопасность, также играет жизненно важную роль в ее укреплении.

Abstract: Food security is a long-term challenge faced by Arab countries, constrained by factors such as geographic location, climate, and water resource scarcity. Most Arab countries are desert-dominated, with a small proportion of arable land, and some countries experience ongoing conflicts that severely restrict agricultural development. Insufficient food self-sufficiency and high dependency on imports further exacerbate the vulnerability of food security in Arab countries. At the same time, food security and socio-economic development are interrelated, influencing each other. Food security is the foundation of national

stability and social development, and economic policies that support food security also play a vital role in its enhancement.

Негизги сөздөр: араб өлкөлөрү; азык-түлүк коопсуздугу; экономикалык аракеттештик

Ключевые слова: арабские страны; продовольственная безопасность; экономическое взаимодействие

Keywords: Arab countries; food security; economic interaction

1. Current Status of Food Production in Arab Countries

Food is the foundation of human survival and development and is an essential material to meet people's basic living needs. Food security is a crucial cornerstone for social stability. When food supply is sufficient and prices remain stable, people's basic living needs are met, and social order is maintained. In contrast, food shortages or price fluctuations can lead to increased social instability and even trigger social unrest. The food security issue in Arab countries presents a state of "internal and external challenges". Internally, it is constrained by various natural conditions, with weak agricultural development, and many essential agricultural products rely heavily on imports. Externally, the impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, and export bans from certain food-exporting countries has made food security in Arab countries highly vulnerable.

1.1 Constraints of Natural Conditions

Arab countries are primarily located in the regions of West Asia and North Africa, including countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Syria. Most of these countries are situated in desert or semi-desert areas, with a tropical desert climate characterized by high temperatures, little rainfall, long hours of sunshine, and high evaporation rates throughout the year. These climatic conditions are extremely unfavorable for agricultural development because crops require adequate water and sunlight for growth, while the climate in Arab countries lacks stable water resources. Taking Saudi Arabia as an example, except for the southwestern plateau and northern regions, which have a subtropical Mediterranean climate, the rest of the country is

characterized by a tropical desert climate. Summers are hot and dry, with maximum temperatures exceeding 50°C, while winters are mild. The annual average precipitation is less than 200 millimeters [1]. Although Syria, located in the Fertile Crescent, has an annual average precipitation of over 1000 millimeters in its coastal regions, the southern areas only receive 100 millimeters of rainfall [2]. The lack of precipitation due to climatic reasons has become one of the primary factors limiting food production in Arab countries. As a result, many Arab countries must rely on river water or groundwater for agricultural activities. However, due to over-extraction and the lack of effective water resource management, the groundwater resources in many Arab countries are rapidly depleting.

In addition, much of the land in Arab countries is desert or semi-desert, with a small proportion of arable land. In Saudi Arabia, 70% of the land area consists of semi-arid wasteland or low-level grassland, with arable land accounting for only 1.6% of the country's total land area. The soil is infertile, with low organic matter content and poor water retention capacity. Dairy products, meat, and fresh agricultural products, in particular, heavily rely on imports, with major import countries being New Zealand, the United States, and Brazil. The main import countries for fruits and vegetables are China, Turkey, and the Netherlands [3]. Additionally, factors such as arid climate, overgrazing, and oil extraction have led to serious land degradation and desertification problems. These issues further weaken the agricultural productivity of Arab countries, making food production more difficult. Moreover, due to the scattered distribution of suitable areas

for crop cultivation, such as oases, agricultural production in some Arab countries struggles to form large-scale operations. Furthermore, influenced by historical and economic factors, some countries have shifted from growing food crops to cultivating economic crops. For instance, Egypt and Bahrain have made such changes. With the development of Egypt's economy, the agricultural output as a share of GDP has decreased. Cotton is Egypt's most important economic crop, primarily medium- and long-staple cotton (less than 35mm and more than 36mm, respectively), often referred to as the "national treasure". After years of reforms, agricultural production has achieved stable growth, making it the fastest-growing sector in the country's economic opening. However, with population growth, Egypt still needs to import food, making it one of the largest food importers in the world [4]. Due to these limitations, the food self-sufficiency rate in Arab countries is generally low, and many countries rely on food imports to meet domestic demand. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, in 2020, the average food self-sufficiency rate in Arab countries was only about 30%. Among them, countries like Saudi Arabia and the

United Arab Emirates had a food self-sufficiency rate of less than 10%, heavily depending on imports. This highly import-dependent food supply system is vulnerable to food security issues when facing factors such as international market fluctuations and trade restrictions.

1.2 Insufficient Food Self-Sufficiency and Dependence on Imports

The food self-sufficiency rate is an important indicator for assessing the degree of a country's food self-sufficiency. Generally, a food self-sufficiency rate over 100% indicates complete self-sufficiency; between 95% and 100% indicates basic self-sufficiency; between 90% and 95% is considered an acceptable level of food security; and below 90%, the risks related to food supply and demand increase. While most Arab countries have largely achieved self-sufficiency in vegetables, meat, and other products, the major staple crops still require significant imports. According to Hanifi, the Secretary General of the Arab Union of Chambers of Commerce, at the 2023 Arab Food Security Conference, Arab countries imported 55% of their basic food requirements in 2020. Despite an estimated 220 million hectares of arable land, only one-third of it has been developed [5].

Table 1. Food Self-Sufficiency Rates in Arab Countries from 2020 to 2022

	Food Self-Sufficiency Rate	2020	2021	2022
	Arab Countries	41.72	42.40	37.18
	Yemen	10.8	8.9	8.8
	Mauritania	36.6	58.0	40.1
	Maghreb	68.7	54.9	28.0
	Egypt	52.0	55.4	54.4
	Libya	7.1	10.5	15.3
	Lebanon	10.4	10.5	10.6
	Kuwait	0.5	1.4	1.8
	Qatar	0.4	0.6	0.5
	Palestine	77.6	21.4	11.8
	Oman	1.7	3.6	16.5
	Iraq	78.3	65.8	44.1

	Somalia	24.5	18.4	13.0
	Syria	85.0	74.4	74.6
	Sudan	84.0	67.3	79.6
	Saudi Arabia	10.1	13.3	7.2
	Djibouti	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Comoros Islands	48.2	34.6	25.5
	Algeria	21.2	17.7	30.0
	Tunisia	31.9	33.8	32.6
	Bahrain	0.0	0.0	0.0
	United Arab Emirates	0.7	1.0	0.7
	Jordan	1.5	3.2	2.0

Data Source: : الكتاب السنوي للإحصاءات الزراعية (Accessed: March 15, 2025)

According to data from the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, between 2020 and 2022, the food self-sufficiency rate in Arab countries was generally low. Among them, countries in the Maghreb region, as well as Egypt, Syria, Sudan, and Iraq, had relatively higher food self-sufficiency rates, but most were below 90%, indicating an increased risk in food supply and demand. Egypt, as one of the major agricultural producers in North Africa, saw a continuous decline in arable land between 2020 and 2022. According to Egypt's Minister of Supply and Internal Trade, Muzzari, Egypt achieved a wheat self-sufficiency rate of 55% in 2021, with consumption reaching 16 million tons and domestic production at 8.5 to 9 million tons. Due to the expansion of grain storage facilities, Egypt's wheat storage capacity increased from 1.2 million tons to the current 3.4 million tons [6]. However, according to Voice of America TV, five Arab countries are among the world's largest wheat importers for 2023-2024, namely Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. The food security issues in other Arab countries are even more severe. Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have food self-sufficiency rates close to zero, while Bahrain and Djibouti face challenges in food self-sufficiency due to their small arable land areas. Due to the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Palestine's food self-

sufficiency rate sharply dropped from 77.6% in 2020 to 11.8% in 2022. According to the latest report from the United Nations World Food Programme's "Integrated Food Security Phase Classification" initiative, more than 1.8 million people in the Gaza Strip, about 86% of the total population, are currently in the third phase of the food security classification, which is the "crisis" level or worse. Approximately 133,000 people, about 6% of the population, are in the most severe fifth phase, which is the "emergency" level of food insecurity [7]. Similarly, Lebanon's food insecurity situation has further worsened due to the conflict. A joint report from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Food Programme (WFP) indicates that by the end of 2024, following the escalation of the conflict, nearly one-third of Lebanon's population will face severe food insecurity. Currently, approximately 1.65 million people are facing food security crises or emergencies (Phase 3 or higher) [8].

The current status of food production in Arab countries varies due to differences in geography and resources. Gulf Arab countries generally face agricultural resource limitations and a high dependency on external supplies, while North African Arab countries are affected by multiple factors, including political conflicts and climate change. According to data from the

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Russia accounts for 40-70% of the total wheat imports of Arab countries, Ukraine accounts for about 20%-35%, and France supplies 30%-60% mainly to North African countries such as Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. The United States and Australia account for 15%-50%, primarily supplying Iraq and some Gulf countries. As of December 2024, Egypt's state food procurement agency has signed contracts for 1.267 million tons of wheat, mainly from Russia, to meet its needs until June 2025. Additionally, Egypt plans to reduce wheat imports by adding corn or sorghum to subsidized bread [9].

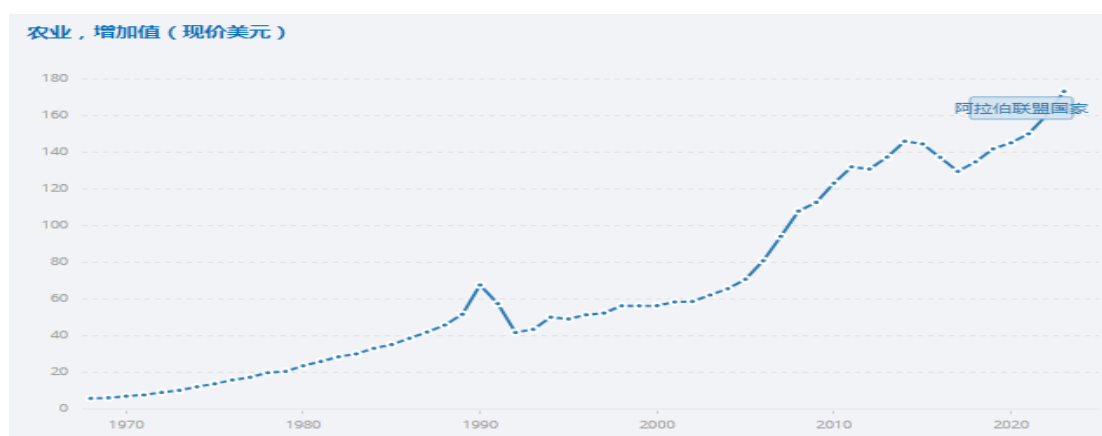
2. The Impact of Socio-Economic Development on Food Security in Arab Countries

Leveraging the benefits from resources such as oil and tourism, Arab countries have not only increased investments in agricultural technology but have also promoted innovation and application of agricultural technologies, as well as external cooperation. By improving food production capacity and efficiency, they have gradually reduced dependence on external food supplies. Furthermore, through better food distribution and upgrading consumption structures, they have enhanced national food security and the quality of life for their populations. Therefore, economic development has become a crucial cornerstone for Arab achievement of sustainable development goals in the region.

countries to ensure food security, achieve social stability, and realize sustainable development.

2.1 Economic Growth Promotes Agricultural Investment and Technological Advancements

Since the 1960s and 1970s, the development of the oil economy in Arab countries has increased government fiscal revenue. As a result, both the government and society have continually increased agricultural investments to improve agricultural production conditions, and have enhanced food productivity through the introduction of advanced technologies and equipment, as well as the cultivation of high-quality crop varieties. According to data from the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, the import of agricultural machinery in Arab countries has shown an upward trend, rising from \$188 million in 2018 to \$432 million in 2022. The Saudi Arabian government provides interest-free or low-interest loans to farmers and agricultural companies through institutions such as the Saudi Arabian Agricultural Bank, supporting the purchase of agricultural equipment, seeds, fertilizers, and other production materials. Additionally, the Arab Agricultural Investment and Development Corporation has invested in 52 enterprises and projects to support agricultural development in Arab countries, contributing to the



Data Source: World Bank <https://data.worldbank.org.cn/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.CD?locations=1A>
(Accessed: March 15, 2025)

Figure 1. Agricultural Value Added in Arab League Countries from 1968 to 2023

Saudi Arabia invests billions of riyals annually to introduce seawater desalination technology and equipment. From a desalination capacity of only 83,000 cubic meters in 1969, the total desalinated water reached 1.27 billion cubic meters in 2012, making Saudi Arabia the world leader in seawater desalination. Additionally, the country has restricted groundwater extraction and promoted drip irrigation technology, which has increased the arable land area in Saudi Arabia from 0.53% in 1961 to 1.6% in 2021 [10]. The Saudi Agricultural Development Fund plans to increase its agricultural loan approvals to \$2 billion by 2025, representing a 9% year-on-year growth. The government's direct investments provide funding for agricultural enterprises, promoting farm modernization, improving agricultural production efficiency, and advancing smart agriculture. Additionally, agricultural technology cooperation between China and Arab countries has brought advanced agricultural technologies and management experiences to the region. From the eight joint actions proposed at the first China-Arab Summit to the current five major cooperation frameworks, China-Arab relations have entered a new phase. The China-Arab jointly built modern agricultural research laboratories and agricultural technology cooperation demonstration projects have provided technical support and training services for agricultural production in Arab countries. For example, the Mauritania Livestock Demonstration Center, located at the edge of the Sahara Desert, has cultivated nearly a thousand acres of fodder and shared soil improvement, water-saving irrigation, and other technologies with agricultural technicians from Mauritania, the UAE, Sudan, and other countries [11]. The combined effects of agricultural investment and technological advancements have significantly enhanced the food production capacity of Arab countries. In 2022, the total trade value of agricultural products between China and Arab countries surpassed \$5 billion, marking six consecutive years of growth. This reflects the strengthening of food production capabilities in Arab countries [12].

2.2 Food Security Challenges in Economic Development

2.2.1 Population Migration and Urbanization

In terms of urbanization rates, most Arab countries have entered the later stage of urbanization, known as the stabilization phase, with more than 70% of their populations residing in urban areas. According to the 2018 United Nations report on Urban Population by Country, all Arab countries, except Egypt (43.3%), Sudan (36.8%), Mauritania (58.5%), Morocco (65.5%), Yemen (40.5%), Comoros (30.4%), Syria (58%), and Somalia (48.5%), have urbanization rates exceeding 70% [13], indicating they are in the stabilization phase of urbanization.

Urbanization has led to a reduction in the amount of arable land and a decline in land quality. The quantity and quality of arable land directly affect food security. As industrial scale and urban areas expand, large amounts of land that were once used for agricultural production are being repurposed for industrial expansion and urban construction, resulting in a significant reduction in arable land. According to the World Bank's 2022 data on agricultural land use, in the Gulf Arab countries, Saudi Arabia has 80.8% of land designated for agriculture, but only 1.6% of it is arable land. Kuwait has 0.44%, the UAE has 0.7%, Oman has 0.27%, Qatar has 1.82%, and Bahrain has 2.7%. In North African Arab countries, Egypt has only 4% of agricultural land, but its arable land area reaches 3.09%. Djibouti has 0.12%, and Somalia has 1.75% [14]. Egypt, traditionally an agricultural powerhouse, has relied on the Nile River and its delta for sustenance. However, with the advancement of modernization, by the 1980s, Cairo had expanded into three administrative districts, with this expansion occurring at the cost of encroaching on the agricultural land surrounding the city [15]. In addition, there are also illegal buildings constructed on arable land. Egyptian Cabinet spokesman Nader Saad stated that nearly 12% of the country's arable land has been replaced by construction land. He referred to the encroachment of urbanization on arable land as "a

national-level disaster” [16]. Agriculture has been considered the backbone of Jordan’s economy; however, over the past forty years, the agricultural sector has been marginalized. Due to insufficient planning and the blind expansion of urban centers, Jordan’s arable land has decreased. Additionally, Saudi Arabia’s futuristic linear city plan, which aims to build the city along the Red Sea coast at the intersection of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, may accommodate a larger population. However, if not properly managed, waste generated during the construction process could significantly impact the local environment.

The environmental pollution and ecological damage caused during industrialization have also had adverse effects on agricultural production. Industrial wastewater and emissions can pollute surrounding farmlands and irrigation water sources, leading to a decline in soil quality and a reduction in land fertility, which, in turn, affects the growth and yield of food crops, thus impacting food security. Industrialization has led to the release of large amounts of toxic gases and pollutants. According to the 2023 IQAir Global Air Quality Report, among the top 20 most polluted countries and regions, six Arab countries are listed: Iraq (43.8), UAE (43), Egypt (42.4), Kuwait (39.9), Bahrain (39.2), and Qatar (36.8), with average PM_{2.5} concentrations exceeding standards by 5 to 10 times. At the same time, Gulf Arab countries, which are dominated by oil economies, are highly susceptible to oil spills, which can lead to further contamination of water sources and arable land. However, it is noteworthy that in the 2024 Global Air Quality Report, only two Arab countries, Egypt (42.5) and Iraq (39.7), are among the top 20 most polluted countries and regions.

Urbanization not only leads to the loss of rural labor but also causes desertification, which deteriorates the production conditions in rural areas. The decline in land productivity has caused many farmers to lose their livelihoods. In search of better living conditions and employment opportunities, these farmers are forced to migrate to cities. The influx of large rural populations into urban areas has resulted in a loss of labor in rural regions and the abandonment of agricultural land. The rapid development of urbanization has caused

urban population growth to outpace rural population growth. In most Gulf Arab countries, the rural population growth rate has shown negative trends. For example, Jordan’s rural population growth rate declined from 4.91% in 1950 to -0.68% in 2024, with rural population accounting for 9% in 2018. Lebanon’s rural population growth rate in 2024 is -1.75%, with rural population representing 12%. Kuwait has a zero growth rate in its rural population, with rural population representing 0%. Qatar’s rural population is 99.1% [17]. The severe loss of rural populations can lead to the phenomenon of “hollow villages”, with a serious aging issue in rural areas, further exacerbating agricultural production difficulties.

Urbanization and population migration have further intensified the pressure on food supply, leading to greater challenges for urban infrastructure and public services. Moreover, the high demand and consumption patterns brought about by urbanization also exacerbate the pressure on food supply. Taking Qatar as an example, the influx of foreign workers due to the oil economy and social welfare system has led to a population surge in the country’s major cities, resulting in a sharp increase in the demand for food and other agricultural products. However, agricultural production in the surrounding urban areas is often unable to meet this demand, thereby increasing reliance on imported food.

2.2.2 Potential Threats to Food Security in Arab Countries from International Environmental Changes

Geopolitical conflicts are the primary factor affecting food security in Arab countries in the current international environment. These conflicts lead to severe disruptions or even complete interruptions of food production and exports in conflict zones. According to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Ukraine and Russia together account for nearly 30% of global wheat exports, making them key “granaries” for the world. The supply chain disruptions caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict have tightened market supply, resulting in significant fluctuations in global food prices [18]. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has not only led to a tightening of global food market supplies but has also directly

impacted the food import channels of Arab countries. With the exception of the Gulf countries, other Arab countries' dependence on wheat imports is as follows: Jordan (99%), Yemen (94.7%), Libya (87.8%), Sudan (85.2%), Lebanon (77.5%), Algeria (74.9%), Tunisia (70.9%), Egypt (55.4%), Iraq (47.8%), and Morocco (41.5%). [19] According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine account for over 50% of Arab countries' total wheat imports. With the ongoing conflict, both countries have imposed restrictions on food exports, leading to higher food import costs and decreased supply stability for Arab countries. The rise of international trade protectionism could also result in increased trade barriers, further exacerbating food security issues in the region. Since the escalation of the Ukraine crisis, Ukraine's food export ports have been blocked, causing Ukrainian grain to be unable to be exported, leading to a situation where exporting countries have food stockpiled, but importing countries have no food available. The continuation of the war has led many key agricultural producers to restrict exports, prioritizing domestic food security, especially in countries with low food self-sufficiency rates such as Egypt, Algeria, and Lebanon, where major food crops are banned from export. However, it is still uncertain whether geopolitical conflicts will trigger changes in the global food trade pattern. On one hand, the restriction of food exports from conflict zones may prompt other countries to seek new food sources. On the other hand, to reduce dependence on conflict regions, some countries may increase cooperation with other food-producing countries and establish diversified food import channels. This shift in trade patterns may impact the stability of the global food market, while also creating new trade opportunities.

Additionally, the global financial crisis had a significant impact on the economies of Arab countries, especially the rise in global food prices in 2008. Arab countries generally faced fiscal pressure, particularly those with fragile economies. The surge in food prices became a trigger for food crises, higher inflation, and increased social instability. Arab countries are experiencing a trend where food prices continue

to rise with the global increase in consumption levels. Food prices are no longer "weather-dependent" but are "market-dependent", meaning that even in favorable weather conditions, food prices can skyrocket [20]. To ensure domestic food supply and stabilize food prices, these countries often need to invest substantial amounts of money in food subsidies. In Egypt, to mitigate the food crisis, the government has focused on reforming the bread subsidy system, with the weight of the bread loaves halved. The rising cost of imported feed has caused meat prices to soar, and lentil prices have also increased due to higher fuel prices and transportation costs, rising from 10 Egyptian pounds to 60 Egyptian pounds. However, in the context of a global economic slowdown and increasing fiscal pressures, these countries often struggle to maintain expensive food subsidy policies. Any reduction or elimination of subsidies will directly lead to rising domestic food prices, further affecting people's living standards and social stability.

3. The Impact of Food Security Issues on Socio-Economic Development in Arab Countries

Although investments in agricultural technology have increased, improving food productivity and reducing import costs takes time. The prolonged reliance on food imports has led to financial difficulties for some Arab countries. Food shortages and price hikes not only increase the financial burden on the government and the cost of living for citizens but can also trigger social unrest and political instability, undermining a stable environment for economic development. Furthermore, food is a fundamental necessity, and its stable supply is a crucial foundation for economic growth and social stability. The long-term existence of food security issues will limit the economic development potential of Arab countries.

3.1 Heavy Economic Burden

Arab countries are generally highly dependent on food imports, particularly staple foods like wheat and rice. Due to significant fluctuations in global food market prices, along with factors such as transportation costs and tariffs, food imports have become a major financial burden for national governments. According to reports published by organizations

such as the United Nations, the Arab region is one of the areas with the highest food import rates in the world, and importing food requires large amounts of foreign exchange. For countries like Egypt and Tunisia, which face foreign exchange shortages, food imports become a heavy economic pressure point. This economic burden not only limits government investment and development in other sectors but can also trigger foreign exchange shortages and debt crises, which in turn could impact the entire economic system. Table 1.3 shows that from 2020 to 2022, the share of food imports in total agricultural imports remained high in Arab countries, with most countries

maintaining a share of over 80% for a prolonged period. Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Somalia, Qatar, and Yemen consistently maintained a share of over 90% over the three years. The total value of agricultural product and food imports in Arab countries accounted for about a quarter of global food imports. Moreover, due to domestic and international circumstances, countries unable to achieve food self-sufficiency are inevitably forced to provide food subsidies to mitigate the crisis, which undoubtedly adds another economic pressure to the government in terms of foreign exchange needed for importing food.

Table 2. Share of Food Imports in Agricultural Imports in Arab Countries from 2020 to 2022

Country	2020	2021	2022
Jordan	35%	88.1%	90.9%
United Arab Emirates	84.9%	85.3%	80.6%
Bahrain	87.7%	89.1%	89.5%
Tunisia	70.9%	70.3%	74.3%
Algeria	89.8%	92.4%	92.3%
Comoros	94.1%	91.6%	67.7%
Islands			
Djibouti	72.6%	78%	73.2%
Saudi Arabia	91.3%	92%	90.5%
Sudan	91.6%	89.4%	93.5%
Syria	66.7%	73.3%	82%
Somalia	71.7%	79.1%	96.4%
Iraq	82.1%	81.1%	89.8%
Oman	27.2%	59.3%	91.6%
Palestine	67.9%	64.3%	88%
Qatar	91.4%	90.8%	90%
Kuwait	88.8%	90.7%	87.5%
Lebanon	88.6%	86.9%	86.3%
Libya	77%	78.5%	89.9%
Egypt	81.3%	92.4%	88.8%
Morocco	75.9%	93%	75.6%
Mauritania	90.7%	89.5%	90.9%
Yemen	91.2%	91.5%	93.7%

Data Source : الكتاب السنوي للإحصاءات الزراعية <https://aoad.org/ASSY43/statbook43Cont.htm>

(Accessed: March 15, 2025)

Food is the foundation of people's livelihoods, and its price fluctuations directly impact consumers' cost of living. When food supply is insufficient or prices rise, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) typically increases, leading to inflation. Due to the low food self-sufficiency rate

in Arab countries, fluctuations in international food market prices are easily transmitted domestically, causing price increases and exacerbating inflation. According to data from the Egyptian National Statistical Office, the food price inflation rate in June 2024 compared to June

2023 reached 30.8%. The Central Statistical Bureau's report indicated that in February 2024, meat prices in Iraq increased by 5.5% compared to the previous month. According to World Bank statistics, in May 2024, Bahrain's actual food inflation rate reached 6%, and Palestine's was as high as 36%, among the top 10 countries with the highest inflation rates.

In today's globalized world, a country's economic strength and international standing largely depend on its industrial competitiveness and resource self-sufficiency. Due to serious food security issues, Arab countries may find themselves in a passive position in the international market, struggling to compete equally with other nations. This not only limits their influence and voice on the international stage but may also lead to losses and exclusion in international trade.

3.2 Increased Instability

Food security is directly related to people's basic living needs, and when food supply is insufficient or prices are excessively high, it can easily lead to social dissatisfaction and unrest. Due to various factors such as history, politics, and religion, social stability in Arab countries is already relatively fragile. Once food security issues erupt, they can easily become a trigger for social upheaval. Since the Arab Spring in 2010, the La Niña phenomenon has severely affected major food-exporting countries, leading to a dramatic surge in global food prices. "Overall, the grain market is primarily dominated by developed countries, especially the United States. Therefore, if there is a crisis in grain production in any of the major producing regions, it will severely impact food prices worldwide, as was the case in 1973.[21]" After years of war and blockade, Yemen has become one of the countries with the largest food security crisis in the world, with two-thirds of its population urgently in need of humanitarian aid and protection services. This situation has not only exacerbated social unrest and crisis within Yemen but has also posed a threat to the security and stability of the entire region. At the same time, the skyrocketing food prices have been a trigger for unrest in Egypt and Tunisia. The availability of food in Africa is challenged by restrictions from food-exporting

countries and locust infestations. Food accessibility is impacted by supply shortages caused by disruptions in food trade, with vulnerable groups suffering from the dual pressures of reduced economic ability and rising food prices. The stability of food supply fluctuates due to political instability and climate change. Food utilization rates are impacted by consumer hoarding and lack of physical activity, leading to severe food waste and an increase in the proportion of malnourished populations [22]

It is evident from the previous two food crises that food security issues deeply affect the stability of Arab countries. If the stability of Arab countries is impacted, it could lead to fluctuations in international oil prices. The current Russia-Ukraine conflict has already begun to drive up food prices in Arab countries. The ultimate effect of the food crisis will manifest in people's dietary and nutritional levels. Food shortages and price increases may put low-income groups at risk of hunger and malnutrition. This impact may be even more severe in developing countries with underdeveloped economies, political instability, and limited governance. In 2016, among the approximately 815 million people experiencing food insecurity, 489 million lived in conflict-affected countries. Similarly, among the 155 million children suffering from stunting, 122 million lived in conflict zones [23] The food security issues in the Arab world are influenced by various factors, which are interwoven and interconnected. These factors not only exacerbate the food crisis but also increase the difficulty of addressing food security challenges.

To address the challenges mentioned above, Arab countries need to take a series of measures to ensure food security. Domestically, governments should not only introduce modern agricultural technologies and equipment to improve irrigation facilities but also promote water-saving irrigation techniques to enhance crop yield and quality. They should also optimize land resource allocation and utilization to ensure the effective protection and reasonable use of agricultural land. At the same time, urban planning and construction management should be strengthened to prevent excessive expansion and encroachment on agricultural land. Externally,

countries should reduce dependency risks on a single nation by strengthening cooperation with food-exporting countries, expanding food import channels, and establishing a diversified food supply system.

Conclusion

Food security in Arab countries is a complex social issue, influenced not only by geographical factors but also by domestic urbanization and changes in international circumstances, which significantly affect the countries' dependence on foreign food supplies. Moreover, food security and socio-economic development are interrelated. Increased spending on agricultural technology drives improvements in agricultural infrastructure, which in turn reduces the high dependence on foreign food. At the same time, food insecurity and fluctuations in food prices impact people's livelihoods and create a series of social instability factors. Therefore, food security must be given high priority in the process of economic development. Measures such as strengthening agricultural production, optimizing resource allocation, and enhancing international cooperation are necessary to address the challenges brought by urbanization, industrialization, and changes in the international trade environment, ensuring national food security and the sustainable development of the economy and society.

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