I. The Omer and Shavuot

Exodus 23:16, translation from Judaica Press
And the festival of the harvest, the first fruits of your labors, which you will sow in the field, and the festival of the ingathering at the departure of the year, when you gather in [the products of] your labors from the field.

Rashi to Exodus 23:16, translation from Judaica Press
And the festival of the harvest: That is the feast of Shavuoth.

Mishna Menachot, 8:1, translation by Rafael Fisch
All offerings of the congregation or of the individual may be brought from the Land or from outside the Land, from the new or from the old, except the omer and the Two Loaves, which may be brought only from the new and from the Land. And all may come only from the choicest.

Rashi to Exodus 23:16, translation from Judaica Press
The first fruits of your labors: which is the time of the bringing of the first fruits for the two breads, which are brought on Shavuoth [and serve to] permit the new grain [to be used] for meal offerings and [also] to bring the first fruits to the Sanctuary, as it is said: “And on the day of the first fruits, etc.” (Num. 28:26).

Deuteronomy 26:5-10
An Armanean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation – great, strong and numerous... Then we cried out to HaShem, the G-d of our forefathers, and HaShem heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil and our oppression. HaShem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great
awesomeness, and with signs and with wonders. He brought us to this place, and he gave us this Land, a Land flowing with milk and honey. And now behold! I have brought the first fruit of the ground that You have given me, O HaShem! (translation by Artscroll Mesorah)

**Discussion:**
1. What strikes you about the offerings brought on Shavuot? How are they different from other offerings?
2. What does the Torah mean by “fruit” in this context?
3. What kind of emotion is evoked by the statement which was recited when the first fruits were brought? What can this teach us about our relationship to our land and our food?

**II. Goats, Sheep, and Farmers’ Fields**

Deuteronomy 31:20

> כִּי אֲבִיאֶנוּ אֶל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶר נִשְבַעְתִי לַאֲבֹתָיו, זָבַת חָלָב וּדְבַש, וְאָכַל וְשָבַע, וְדָשֵן...

When I bring them to the land which I have sworn to their forefathers [to give them], a land flowing with milk and honey, they will eat and be satisfied, and live on the fat [of the land].

Ketubot 111b

> רמי בר יחזקאל איקלע לבני ברק חזנהו להנהו עיזי דקאכלן תותי תאיני וקנטיף דובשא מתאיני וחליב טייף מנייהו ומעריב בהדי הדדי

Rami b. Ezekiel once paid a visit to Bene-berak where he saw goats grazing under fig-trees while honey was flowing from the figs, and milk ran from them, and these mingled with each other. 'This is indeed', he remarked, '[a land] flowing with milk and honey'.

Babylonian Talmud Tractate Ketubot 111b, translation from Soncino

Our Rabbis taught: The following are pasture animals and the following are household animals. Pasture animals are such as are led out about [the time of] Passover and graze in [more distant] meadows, and who are led in at the time of the first rainfall. The following are household animals: Such as are led out and graze outside the city - border but return and spend the night inside the city-border. Rabbi says: Both of these are household animals; but pasture animals are such as are led out and graze in [more distant] meadows and who do not return to the habitation of men either in summer or in winter.

Bava Batra 36a

Some goats [went into a field] in Nehardea [and] ate some peeled barley [which they found there]. The owner of the barley went and seized them, and made a heavy claim on the owner of the goats.

Mishna: It is not right to breed small cattle in the land of Israel. They may however be bred in Syria or in the
It is not right to breed small cattle (goats and sheep) in the land of Israel: because they spread out to the fields.

Rav Ovadia Bartenura, commentary to the Mishna, translation by Y. Neril:
It is not right to breed small cattle in the land of Israel: because of settlement of the land of Israel, since they destroy the seeds.

Rashi, commentary to the Mishna, translation by Y. Neril:
It is not right to breed small cattle in the land of Israel: because of settlement of the land of Israel, sin since they devour the fields, and in general all fields in the land of Israel belong to Jews.

Discussion:
1. How important were small cattle (sheep and goats) to the food supply and economy of ancient Israel?
2. Why was breeding “small cattle” prohibited? What can we learn from the different commentaries on the reason?
3. In the context of Israel as a “land flowing with milk and honey,” do you think that this prohibition is surprising?

III. Grapevines and Olive Trees

They [the priests] then began to take up the logs to lay the fire. Were all kinds of wood suitable for the fire? All kinds of wood were suitable for the fire except vine and olive wood. What they mostly used, however, were boughs of fig trees and of nut trees and of oil trees.

Aside from of olive tree and grapevine [quote of the Mishna]. Why were these excepted? — Rav Papa said: Because they have knots. Rav Aha bar Ya’akov said: Because of the settlement of the Land of Israel... Rabbi Eleazar adds [as not suitable]: also wood from the matish and the oak and the date tree and the carob and sycamore. ... But to the one who says, ‘it is because of the settlement of the Land of Israel,’ we can object, does not the date tree contribute to the amenities of the Land of Israel? — He can reply to you: By the same reasoning does not the fig tree contribute to the amenities of the Land of Israel? But what do you answer to
this? That we speak of a fig tree which does not produce fruit. Similarly we speak of a date tree which does not produce fruit. But are there fig trees which do not produce fruit? Yes, as stated by Rahabah...

Mefaresh, an unidentified Rishon (writing between 1000 and 1400 C.E.) which appears in place of Rashi, to Tractate Tamid, 29b, translation by Yonatan Neril

Certainly the reason is as is stated because of knots [these woods] are invalid, but even without the reason of knots, for a different reason they would desist [from using them.] What is it? Because of 'the settlement of the land of Israel.' Since if they would burn the olive trees and grapevines, there would not be found wine to drink or oil to anoint with, and the land of Israel would be destroyed...

Rambam, Hilchot Isurei Mizbe'ach, 7:3

All new wood is fit for the arranged pile [of wood on the altar in the Temple] and they would not bring from olive trees or grapevines because of settlement of the land of Israel.

Discussion:
1. According to these texts, why were certain trees prohibited from the sacrifices?
2. How does this teaching relate to other ways that the Torah balances our resource use?

IV. Greenbelts, Fields, and Cities

Perek 32:2-3

Command the children of Israel that they shall give to the Levites from their hereditary possession cities in which to dwell, and you shall give the the Levites open spaces around the cities. These cities shall be theirs for dwelling, and their open spaces shall be for their cattle, their property, and for all their needs.

Arachin 33b

Rambam, Zeraim, Hilchos Shmittah V'Yovel 13:5

And so with the rest of Israel’s cities – we do not make a cultivated field into an open space nor an open space into a cultivated field, nor an open space into a city nor a city into open space.

*See also http://canfeinesharim.org/community/shevat.php?page=11533 for additional insights on migrash in Torah thought.
Discussion:
1. How does this ruling protect farmland and agriculture?
2. How is this more sustainable than common practices today?

V. Farmland of a Captive Farmer

It has been stated: If a man is taken captive, Rab said: His next of kin is not authorised to enter upon his estate [i.e. to plant and farm his land]; Samuel said: His next of kin is authorised to enter into his estate.

Now, if it was heard that he was dead, all agree that he is authorised to enter. They differ where it was not heard that he had died: Rab said: We do not authorise him to enter, lest he cause them [the fields] to deteriorate; but Samuel said: We authorise him to take possession, for since a Master said, ‘We value it for them as for an aris’ [a tenant farmer], he will not permit deterioration.

...the Rabbis enacted a measure on his behalf [of the captive], so that he [the tenant] might not cause them [the abandoned land of the estate] to deteriorate.

Rashi to Bava Metzia 38b:
‗[lest] he cause them [the estates] to deteriorate‘: and he will not fertilize the land with manure and he will plant incessantly and cause the land to deteriorate.

Rashi to Bava Metzia 39a [the following page of Talmud, commenting on the Rabbinic decree]: ‘the Rabbis enacted a measure on his behalf [of the captive], so that he [the tenant] might not cause them [the abandoned estates] to deteriorate’—so that he will not degrade the land by planting it incessantly, and not tend it and hoe the vineyards [to aerate them].

Genesis 2:15
Now the Lord God took the man, and He placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.

Discussion:
1. Why was the next of kin given a share in the farm?
2. Can you think of examples where we have something for only a short time and thus lose the incentive to protect it?
3. Can you think of any modern circumstances which could be addressed in a similar way?
4. What can all of these different teachings help us understand about rabbinic perspectives on settling and sustaining the land?

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