A definitive installation of the growing season in the month of July

- The growing season is well-established across the country, where extremely good rainfall suggests good harvest prospects, except in both Tillabéri and Dosso regions where reports of significant delays in the start-of-season could reduce crop yields.

- Due to assistance programs and visible improvements in the progression of the agricultural season in agropastoral and pastoral areas, food insecurity levels are generally in IPC Phase 2: Stress, except in the Tillabéri region.

- There are no new developments with respect to the locust threat, but the continued risk of infestations warrants the deployment of canvassing and treatment teams to gregarization areas by the government and its partners.

- Heavy rains and record high flows of the Niger River are threatening the livelihoods of close to 300,000 people across the country. Reported flooding is also heightening the risk of outbreaks of cholera and malaria.

- Preliminary findings by the nutrition survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Health, and partners between June and August of this year suggest that 14.8 percent of children under the age of five are currently suffering from global acute malnutrition, compared with an average of 13.04 percent in June.

Updated food security outlook through December 2012

Current food security situation and outlook
The current food security situation is marked by a tightening of market supplies of millet and cereal access issues for poor households as the lean season reaches its peak. Prices are even higher than usual at this stage of the lean season (August), driven by the combined effects of low market supplies of millet, shortages of government reserves earmarked for sale at subsidized prices, and an exceptionally high household demand for personal consumption and religious gift-giving (zakat). However, in spite of these unfavorable market conditions, most at-risk households are able to meet their food needs thanks to ongoing humanitarian assistance programs in the form of cash transfer programs, distributions of free food aid, and blanket feeding programs. With the prospect of shipments of new crops to local markets in September and a likely ensuing drop in prices, in general, most households should be in IPC Phase 2: Stress in August/September and in IPC Phase 1: Minimal between October and December.

This report is an update of the Food Security Outlook published in July 2012 assessing food security conditions for the period from July through December 2012. The next Outlook report covering the period from October 2012 through March 2013 will be released in October.
A joint government/UNICEF/WHO/WFP/UNOCHA mission conducted over the period from August 14th through August 16th assessed damage from and responses to the flooding problems in the Dosso region, where 62,784 flood-stricken residents of 246 villages lost 388 head of livestock, crops were under water, and 10,071 homes had collapsed. Water levels in the Niger River basin at Niamey were at all-time highs in the history of streamflow measurements. The government has drawn up a relief plan for a target population of 273,000 individuals or 39,000 households. Emergency food needs for the next two months are estimated at 7,800 metric tons, including an immediate need for 2,379 metric tons of provisions.

Nutritional monitoring data shows an average five percent drop in new cases of malnutrition between June and July of this year due to treatment efforts and the effects of the cash transfer programs, targeted distributions of free food aid, and blanket feeding programs starting up in July. The rises in admissions to feeding centers in Magaria (71 percent), Diffa (40 percent), and Dogon Doutchi (39 percent) departments are largely attributable to the presence of more workers conducting systematic screening programs in these departments. According to the findings by the joint nutrition survey conducted by the government and its partners between June and August of this year, 14.8 percent of children under the age of five are suffering from global acute malnutrition. This figure is above the average rate (13 percent) for the same surveys conducted at the same time of year for the last five years. A comparison with the average puts figures for all parts of the country in line with normal seasonal trends, except for prevalence rates in the Tillabéri and Dosso regions, which are both above-average and, in the specific case of Tillabéri, are attributable to household food deficits. As far as health conditions are concerned, the Statistics, Surveillance, and Epidemic Response Unit attached to the Ministry of Public Health (DSSRE) was reporting new cases of cholera and related fatalities throughout the month of August, mainly in the Tillabéri region. However, current and near-term flooding could escalate and expand the geographic scope of this problem over the next few months.

**Status of the 2012/13 growing season**

The 2012/13 growing season began in May, with crops well-established by the end of July and most planting activities concentrated in the month of June, which is more or less on par with the normal seasonal progression. Growing season conditions in August have been marked by a resumption of rainfall activity in all parts of the country following localized dry spells in mid to late July. According to the findings by the joint mid-season crop assessment mission by the Ministry of Agriculture’s Agricultural Statistics Bureau, the SAP (the National Early Warning System), and the country’s food security partners, including FEWS NET, the WFP, and the FAO, on the whole, all growing season monitoring indicators are normal. Regular heavy rains have produced cumulative seasonal rainfall totals of over 500 mm in the rainiest parts of the Maradi and Zinder regions. Most crops in the Diffa, Zinder, and Maradi regions and Gaya department (Dosso) are more advanced, or in the heading/flowering stages of their growth cycle. Crops in most parts of Tillabéri and certain villages in Dosso are less advanced, still in the late sprouting and tillering stages. Most pressure from crop pests is from grain-eating birds, flower-feeding insects, and millet head miners in the Diffa, Zinder, and Maradi regions and Gaya department, plant lice feeding on cowpea and groundnut crops in Zinder and Maradi, and grasshopper infestations of millet crops in the Tahoua, Tillabéri, and Dosso regions. For the time being, regional Plant Protection Services have these problems under control. Forecasts based on crop growth and development are predicting generally average to good harvests, provided the rains continue through the middle of September, and mediocre harvests in the northern reaches of the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions and in Loga department in Dosso. With the delays in crop planting activities and poor soils in these areas, the mission identified 2340 at-risk villages, of which 49 percent were in the Tillabéri region and 22 percent in the Dosso region.

Plant cover in pastoral areas is better this year than during the same time last year. Pastoral areas have been reporting moderate to average rainfall activity. Animals are being watered daily at surface watering holes, facilitating the free movement of livestock in pastoral areas. The physical condition of animals has improved since July, increasing milk and dairy production and the market value of livestock, as reflected in the 25 to 49 percent jump in prices for male goats between June and July. However, terms of trade for livestock/millet are still detrimental to pastoralists and weaker than at the same time last year for all types of animals and all animal species due to the higher price of millet. However, the significant, steady improvement in the physical condition of livestock and the high demand for live animals for the celebration of Tabaski could gradually turn terms of trade in favor of pastoralist households in the coming weeks.

**Market conditions**

Cereal availability through subsidized cereal sales programs is declining due to the low level of the national food security reserve with the earlier than usual start-up of these operations in February instead of June. The government has issued procurement notices for 60,000 metric tons of cereal, of which 19,374 MT are currently in the delivery process. It is issuing
a new procurement notice for another 25,000 metric tons, which should meet needs for August and September as upcoming harvests gradually bolster consumption and market supplies. Such procurements should not have a major effect on markets with on-farm consumption of these freshly harvested crops slowing market demand. Local supplies of these crops should also improve cereal availability in the coming weeks. There has been a high demand for cereal for personal consumption and religious gift-giving as part of the observance of Ramadan. According to the implementation strategy for the relief plan drawn up by the government and its partners, this added demand should have been covered by the simultaneous mounting of subsidized cereal sales and market provisioning programs in target areas. Unfortunately, market supplies of millet have been erratic and the cereal sales program has been suspended in many areas. As a result, the combined effects of local demand and of demand on provisioning markets are helping to keep staple food prices extremely high, at an average of 299 CFA/kg. A price comparison with last month shows a small average nine percent rise in millet prices and 10 percent rise in sorghum prices. However, there have reportedly been sharp rises in millet prices on the Tanout market (by 21.9 percent) and in sorghum prices in Gotheye (by 45.5 percent) since this past June due, mainly, to shortages of these crops and to a strong household demand engendered by the return of migrant workers and transhumant pastoralists and to meet larger consumption needs for farm work and the month-long observance of Ramadan. Millet prices on approximately 72 percent of the markets tracked by FEWS NET are up 50 percent from the same time last year, with the Tanout market reporting the largest price increase, at 109 percent. Prices on 64 percent of the same group of markets are above the five-year average by 40 percent or more, with the Aderbisnat market showing the largest price differential, where sorghum prices are more than twice the five-year average.

**Status of the refugee population**
Available statistics estimate the size of the refugee population (of Niamey, Ouallam, Ayorou, Abala, and Tillia) at 55,194 people or 11,600 households, compared with a planning figure of 90,000 individuals. The assistance program mounted by UNHCR with operational assistance from the WFP and UNICEF and support from Niger’s Interior Ministry through the National Eligibility Commission (NEC), the Ad-hoc Committee, and the Humanitarian Coordination Office and Office of the Resident Coordinator is being implemented by NGOs. The total budget (based on the Comprehensive Needs Assessment) for the U.N. operation in Niger is US $52 million, covering program activities for the period from February through December 2012. A US $2,000,000 contribution from the CERF (Central Emergency Response Fund) Rapid Response Window and other expected contributions from the CERF should fill any funding gaps and meet corresponding needs.

**Agropastoral areas of Filingué, Tillabéri, Téra, and Ouallam**
The growing season in these areas has been marked by erratic rainfall activity, a poor spatial-temporal distribution of rainfall, and lags in crop growth and development, with crops still in anywhere from the sprouting stage (in 56 percent of farming villages) to the tillering stage (in 38 percent of villages). The crops in the least advanced stages of development are in villages in Tillabéri, Ayorou, Abala, Bankilaré, and Banibangou departments. With this lag in the progress of crop growth and development, in general, production forecasts are predicting mediocre harvests in these areas, particularly if the rains end by mid-September. Sources of income in August of this year were limited mainly to farm labor and sales of firewood. The price of a bale of straw weighing approximately one kilogram in urban areas is just barely above 200 XOF, for a cereal equivalent of 0.6 kg. The cereal equivalent for farm work is 21 percent higher than in 2011 due to the stronger demand for labor compared with last year. With current wage rates and prices for firewood, households are able to afford larger amounts of cereal than last year, though still not enough to meet their large food needs for this period of heavy farm labor.

**Seasonal calendar and timeline of critical events**

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**Famine Early Warning Systems Network**

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