Damage to Primera maize crops expected in the dry corridor

KEY MESSAGES

- Most poor households in the dry corridor of all three countries are believed to have depleted their grain stocks (maize and beans) by July, forcing them to rely on market purchase. These households are counting on the August and September harvests and on income from day labor (in coffee, sugar cane, and fruit harvests) at the beginning of October.

- The erratic pattern of rainfall in July and August is expected to cause heavy losses of maize crops in parts of the region’s dry corridor. This will create Stressed food security conditions (IPC Phase 2) for poor households in these areas by November, particularly in Honduras and localized areas of Nicaragua.

- Even with the expected damage to crops in parts of the region’s dry corridor, the Primera harvest should be able to sustain market supplies until the end of November when Postrera crops are harvested.

- The coffee rust crisis will reduce demand for labor for the harvest beginning in October. This will mean even less income for subsistence farmers already affected by rainfall anomalies.

CURRENT SITUATION

- Early-planted maize crops in all three remote monitoring countries (El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua) normally reach maturity by the end of August. Harvesting activities begin in early September and continue through December/January. The delays in the establishment of the current rainy season throughout the region made it necessary to stagger the planting of Primera crops. The good distribution of rainfall in most parts of the three regional countries bodes well for a good harvest in order to meet household needs until the harvesting of Postrera crops in November. On the other hand, the late onset of the May and June rains in certain areas at the start of the growing season and the sporadic rainfall activity in July and August disrupted the most critical stages of crop growth and development (second growth and seed-setting stages).

- Primera crops in surplus grain-producing areas should be able to sustain market grain supplies until the end of November and the harvest of Postrera crops.
In general, prices for staple foodstuffs (maize, beans, and rice) did not dramatically increase between July and August in any of the remote monitoring countries, as might be expected in view of seasonal trends in production. However, the losses and damage to *Primera* crops could trigger a steady rise in prices by the end of this year.

Maize prices in Honduras and Nicaragua are well above last year’s prices and the five-year average (by 40 to 50 percent) due to last year’s below-average harvests in Nicaragua and near-average harvests in Honduras. This is not the case in El Salvador, where market prices are below figures for both reference periods. This is attributed to the programs promoting staple grain crop production carried out with government assistance for the past few years.

Red bean prices on Honduran and Nicaraguan markets are down slightly from last year and the five-year average, but market prices in El Salvador show the sharpest drops compared with both reference periods. This is attributable to market expectations based on last year’s above-average *Postrera* crop harvests in all three countries.

Trends in rice prices across the region showed the most stability compared with last year and the five-year average due to the stable levels of international market prices and world-wide rice production.

**ZONE** | **CURRENT ANOMALIES** | **PROJECTED ANOMALIES**
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**REGION** | ● The limited rainfall in the latter part of July and the beginning of August reduced water availability for *Primera* crops, mainly in the dry corridor. | ● Lower crop yields, mainly from maize crops grown in the dry corridor of each country. | ● The impact of the coffee rust outbreak is two to four times greater than usual. | ● Significant reduction in harvested areas for the 2013/2014 growing season and similarly less temporary employment opportunities for migrant households. |
**EL SALVADOR** | ● The sporadic rainfall activity in the latter part of July and the early part of August dried up soil water reserves. However, so far, there have been no reports of crop failure. | ● The rainfall deficits in July and August could create production shortfalls in grain-producing areas of La Unión and Usulután departments. | | |
**HONDURAS** | ● The sporadic rainfall in the last four weeks created soil water deficits in the most affected departments (Valle, Choluteca, Francisco Morazán, and El Paraíso). | ● There could be shortfalls in *Primera* crop harvests in recurring problem areas of the dry corridor, extending the damage to crop-producing areas of Olancho, Colon, Cortez, and Ocotepeque departments. | | |
**NICARAGUA** | ● Soil Water Index and Water Balance Index maps (for August 1 to 5, 2013) show anomalies in crop-producing areas of León, Chinandega, Estelí, Matagalpa, Nueva Segovia, and Madriz departments. | ● Late-planted crops in areas within the dry corridor could fail completely or produce lower yields. | ● The high levels of rainfall in the Autonomous North Atlantic Region triggered flooding, causing severe damage to crops and animal production. | |

**PROJECTED REGIONAL OUTLOOK THROUGH DECEMBER 2013**

The main groups affected by rainfall anomalies are subsistence and infra-subistence farmers in the dry corridor, through delays in crop planting activities and the irregular pattern of rainfall throughout the *Primera* growing season. Certain commercial agricultural areas supplying domestic markets with crops are also affected (which are showing production shortfalls of close to 20 percent). Commercial agricultural areas of Honduras, for example, are reporting damage to crops in some areas, which could affect markets in other Central American countries. Preliminary field data from affected subsistence agriculture areas shows crop yields reduced by more than 50 percent and, in some cases, complete crop failures.
Forecasts by the Central American Climate Forum predict normal to above-normal rainfall activity for the rest of the rainy season. The current climate outlook for Central America through the end of October shows normal to above-normal rainfall in all three countries. Normal rainfall activity for the first 30 days after the planting of bean crops (the region’s main *Postrera* crop) would produce a good year-end harvest.

Satellite images of water balance anomalies and soil moisture conditions for the period from August 1 - 5 in all three countries were used to identify geographic areas affected by major anomalies in the following departments, as described below.

**EL SALVADOR**

**Table 1. Areas in El Salvador with anomalies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Affected by crop production shortfalls</th>
<th>Affected by the coffee rust outbreak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Unión and Usulután</td>
<td>Zone 4: Eastern basic grain, labor, livestock, and remittances</td>
<td>Livelihood Zone No. 1: Basic grain and labor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Livelihood zone 1. Basic Grain and Labor,** shows no signs of having been affected by any anomalies. Therefore, staple grain production should meet expectations. However, populations in this livelihood zone normally employed as migrant workers in the coffee harvest will be affected by the reduction in employment opportunities due to the impact of crop damage from the coffee rust outbreak. This will leave these households with less income for the purchasing of food supplies, forcing them to migrate to other areas in search of work in other agro-processing activities or general industries. Many of these households will also migrate to urban areas. Farmers in the less densely populated livelihood zone 4 are in a similar situation. Households in both areas should continue to experience Minimal food insecurity (IPC Phase 1) through the end of the year.

**HONDURAS**

**Table 2. Areas in Honduras with anomalies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Affected by crop production shortfalls</th>
<th>Affected by the coffee rust outbreak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Choluteca, El Paraíso, Valle, Francisco Morazán, Olancho, Colon, Cortez, and Ocoitepeque</td>
<td>Zone 3: Vegetable and coffee Zone 4: Eastern basic grain, labor, livestock, and remittances Zone 5: Agro-industrial Zone 8: Subsistence basic grains Zone 9: Basic grains and timber Zone 15: Coffee and basic grains</td>
<td>Copan, Ocoitepeque, Lempira, North Santa Bárbara and Cortés, Santa Bárbara, Lempira and Inibucu, La Paz, Comayagua, and El Paraíso</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Livelihood zones</th>
<th>Affected by the coffee rust outbreak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zone 8: “Subsistence basic grains,” has some of the most vulnerable households to food insecurity, given they migrate to coffee-growing areas to work in the coffee harvest. Zone 15: “Basic grains and coffee,” is a grain-producing and job-creation area for workers in the coffee industry, providing employment opportunities for Nicaraguan households during the coffee harvest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Livelihood zone 8, Subsistence Basic Grains,** is the area most vulnerable to food insecurity Local households here are dependent on harvests of staple grain crops (sorghum, maize, and beans) in degraded areas and on income from temporary work in the coffee harvest for their food supplies, both of which will be affected by the anomalies impeding the current growing season.

Households in this area have depleted their food stocks and are counting on the (September) harvest of *Primera* crops to continue to meet their needs. The climatic anomalies affecting the *Primera* growing season are expected to sharply reduce yields by as much as 50 percent, while the coffee rust crisis will limit income-earning opportunities. Together, these factors will leave these households Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in the last quarter of this year.

**Livelihood zone 9, Basic Grains and Timber, and zone 15, Coffee and Basic Grains,** are the areas most affected by soil water anomalies and Water Balance Index anomalies. Therefore households in these livelihood zones will likely incur damages to their staple grain crops. In addition, employment opportunities in the coffee harvest between October of this year and March of next year will be limited. Accordingly, households in these livelihood zones will be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) as of November of this year.
NICARAGUA

Table 3. Areas in Nicaragua with anomalies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Affected by crop production shortfalls</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>León, Chinandega, Esteli, Ocotal, Matagalpa, and Madriz</td>
<td>Carazo, Managua, Masaya, Granada, and Rivas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Livelihood zones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas with anomalies</th>
<th>Affected by crop production shortfalls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zone 3: Northwest subsistence agriculture, livestock, and alternate income activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rainfall anomalies in the latter part of July and the first half of August delayed crop planting activities, which will mean low yields from staple grain crops for the Primera growing season in parts of the dry corridor. In contrast, the excessive amounts of rain in the northeastern part of the country during the planting of Primera crops is affecting current food access and availability for certain groups of poor households, mainly in the Mosquito coastal areas.

The main sources of food in livelihood zone 3 are crop production and market purchases. Thus, current crop losses are making area households more vulnerable to spikes in staple food prices.

The main sources of income for poor households in this livelihood zone are agricultural employment and labor migration in the coffee harvest, which normally gets underway in October and runs through March of the following year. However, with the damage to this season’s crops from the coffee rust outbreak, there will be a below-normal demand for labor for the 2013/2014 harvest.

Poor households in this livelihood zone will be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) as of November of this year. They will begin next year’s lean season earlier than usual (by April).

SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR

ABOUT REMOTE MONITORING

In remote monitoring, a coordinator typically works from a nearby regional office. Relying on partners for data, the coordinator uses scenario development to conduct analysis and produce monthly reports. As less data may be available, remote monitoring reports may have less detail than those from countries with FEWS NET offices. More at http://www.fews.net/Pages/remote-monitoring.aspx?l=es.