MAURITANIA Food Security Update

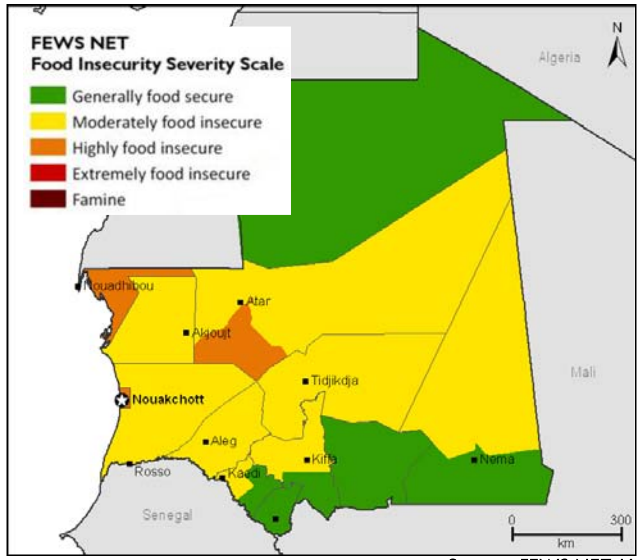
November 2009

- The production forecasts released by the joint harvest assessment mission for the 2009-2010 growing season conducted by FEWS NET, the CILSS, the FAO, the WFP, and the Government of Mauritania were near-average, but 23 percent below figures for the 2008/09 season. This projected shortfall is primarily attributable to the expected sharp decline in rice production due to the unexpected lack of credit owing to collection problems.

- Despite localized pasture deficits (in western and northern transhumant pastoral areas), in general, conditions in livestock-raising areas are still very good.

- Even with a sharp rise in prices for staple food crops, terms of trade for grain/livestock are still in favor of pastoralist households, with livestock prices soaring in the face of the upcoming feast of Tabaski and the year-end holiday season.

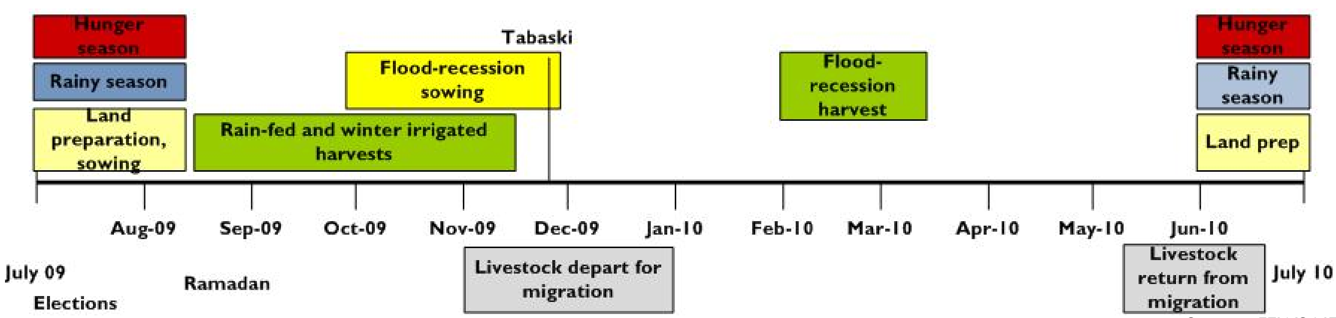
Figure 1. Food estimates of security conditions, November 2009



Source: *FEWS NET Mauritania*
For more information about FEWS NET's food insecurity scale, visit: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

- Food insecurity levels are falling in all rainfed farming and agropastoral areas. In contrast, there are still high levels of food insecurity in urban slum areas due to massive rural-urban migration and the shutdown of the special Ramadan shops selling goods at subsidized prices.

Seasonal calendar and timeline of critical events



Source: *FEWS NET*

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Overview of the food security conditions

Food security levels are steadily improving in rainfed farming areas (zone 6), southern agropastoral areas (zone 5), and northern oasis and pastoral areas (zone 2) due to good pastoral conditions, harvests of short-cycle crops, and advantageous terms of trade with the sharp rise in prices for livestock.

Figure 2. Livelihood zone map of Mauritania

Source: *FEWS NET Mauritania*

Food security levels in the Senegal River Valley, oasis and pastoral areas, and nomadic pastoral areas are still more or less unchanged from October. In general, pastoral conditions are good. However, the irrigated rice harvest in the Senegal River Valley will be only half as large as last year due to the unexpected unavailability of farm credit and minor losses from grain-eating birds and other crop predators. Oasis and pastoral areas with wadi cultivation, and nomadic pastoral areas are not dependent on harvests of rainfed crops but, rather, on crops grown in bottomland areas and wadi beds, which are normally harvested sometime between January and March. Farm families in these areas will continue to rely on local markets for their food supplies, where sorghum and bean prices are once again on the rise due to the need for seeds for the planting of flood-recession crops.

The mediocre physical condition of livestock in transhumant pastoral areas due to the relatively poor grazing and watering conditions in these areas is making it difficult to sell these animals, which are competing with less expensive animals from eastern agropastoral areas in better physical shape. With most transhumant pastoralists still gone from the area, the supply of animals available for sale is smaller than usual for this time of year. Pastoral groups in the western part of this area have already started to leave, in keeping with their normal pattern of seasonal migration, which is dictated much more by watering needs than by a search for pasture. With 30 percent of their annual income coming from local employment and the scant job opportunities available with so few transhumant pastoralists having returned to the area, poor households in this area will have a hard time buying food supplies.

The steady rise in the price of fish in coastal areas is helping to offset hikes in staple food prices (rice, oil, and sugar). The selling price of gilt-head bream, for example, went from 600 UM/kg to 700 UM/kg between October and November. This jump in prices, which is most likely due to speculation with the departure of foreign fish dealers to celebrate the holidays back home, is keeping food security levels for households in coastal villages engaged in small-scale fishing activities relatively stable.

Progress of the 2009/10 agropastoral season

This year, Ministry of Agriculture experts and members of CILSS harvest assessment missions are putting gross grain production at approximately 164,100 metric tons, down 23.6 percent from last year's final production figure of 214,759 MT, but more or less on par with the five-year average of 164,511 MT. A breakdown of this gross production figure for 2009 by type of crop comes to 73,131 MT of sorghum, 1,460 MT of millet, 18,627 MT of corn, 66,921 MT of rice, and 400 MT of wheat and barley. Likewise, a breakdown of total gross grain production by type of farming system puts *diéri* production (rainfed crops) at 43,172 MT, bottomland crop production (in dam areas) at 21,906 MT, bottomland crop production (in depression areas) at 12,019 MT, *walo* production (flood-recession crops) at approximately 12,921 MT (an average estimate), irrigated rainy-season crop production at 34,891 MT, crop production in controlled flood-irrigation schemes at 7,200 MT, and hot off-season crop production at 31,990 MT.

These production shortfalls are primarily attributable to the reduction in the size of areas planted in irrigated rice crops due to the withholding of farm credit, as well as to lower yields for rainfed grain crops due to drought conditions early in the season and the shorter than usual rainy season in certain parts of Guidimakha, Hodh Ech Gharbi, and Hodh Ech Chargui.

So far this season, no measures have been taken to assist farmers hoping to grow cold and hot off-season crops.

Pastoral conditions are still satisfactory despite a few pockets of pasture deficits, particularly in central and western rainfed farming areas, southern agropastoral areas, and western transhumant pastoral areas. The delay in the establishment of firebreaks in areas with good pasture resources poses a high risk of damage to pasturelands. There are already reports of brush fires destroying pasturelands, particularly in the eastern reaches of this area. Migratory animal herds are keeping to their usual migration corridors, and reported migratory movements are basically in search of surface watering holes with certain seasonal lakes and ponds beginning to dry up.

Poor households in agropastoral and rainfed farming areas and the Senegal River Valley earn 5-10 percent of their income from gathering wild fruits and herbs. With trees and shrubs in these areas producing good new growth, they are hoping to see a clear improvement in their income between October and December, compared with last year.

Grasshoppers are causing damage to young plantlets. Farmers are complaining about the lack of plant health products to combat this scourge.

Markets and trade

Markets are still well-stocked with imported foodstuffs. Coarse grain availability has been bolstered by harvests of short-cycle crops and the stepped-up grain exports from Mali. Prices for certain imports (rice, wheat, and milk), which had come down considerably in September and October, are now on the rise. It is hard to make the connection between these price hikes and the rise in fuel prices, which began several weeks earlier. Despite the pursuit of stock-rebuilding efforts for village-level food security reserve programs (SAVS), the shutdown of the special Ramadan shops is going to weaken household food access in all areas where there are no ongoing harvests of rainfed crops (zones 7, 1, 2, and 3).

There are increasingly large market supplies of staple foodstuffs in rainfed farming areas (the Senegal River Valley and rainfed crop-producing areas) thanks to ongoing harvests. In general, markets are well stocked with staple food crops and imports. Imports of fresh crops from Mali are going a long way towards revitalizing cross-border trade and, in particular, towards improving the availability of pearl millet and groundnut crops.

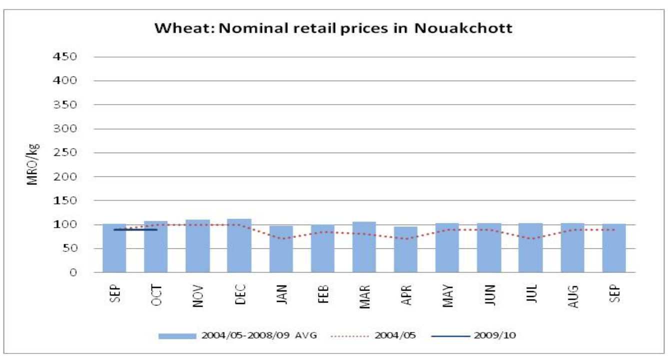
With the shutdown of the special Ramadan shops, which were helping to stabilize prices at one point, prices for imported foods (oil, sugar, milk) are once again on the rise, with sugar prices up 23 percent and the price of rice up 9 percent from September. Prices for staple food crops are coming down with shipments of fresh crops to market, except for the price of beans, which are still in demand due to the need for seeds for flood-recession crops. Bean prices are up by 13 to 17 percent in Mederdra, Magta-lahjar, and Aoujeft, and prices for flood-recession sorghum crops are up by 15 percent in Boghé and 9 percent in Magta-lahjar, where there is still a high demand for bean seeds despite distributions of seeds to farmers in these regions. Terms of trade on all FEWS NET reference markets are still in favor of pastoralist households thanks to the good prices commanded by sheep, despite large market supplies, in the face of needs for the celebration of Tabaski at the end of November. Falling grain prices in Boghé, in the Senegal River Valley, are making up for the high price of sheep. Right now, there are large supplies of livestock but, with so many middlemen, prices vary according to the distance and source of the animals in question.

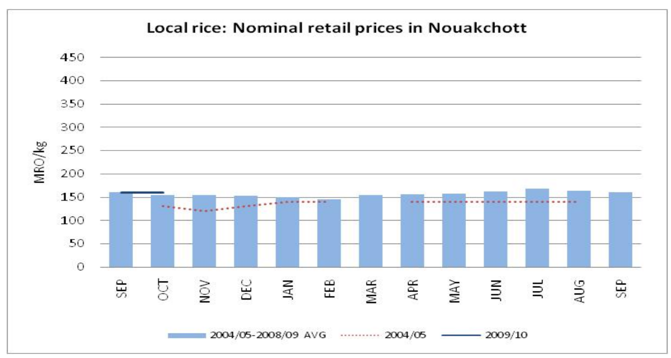
MAURITANIA Monthly Price Bulletin — November 2009

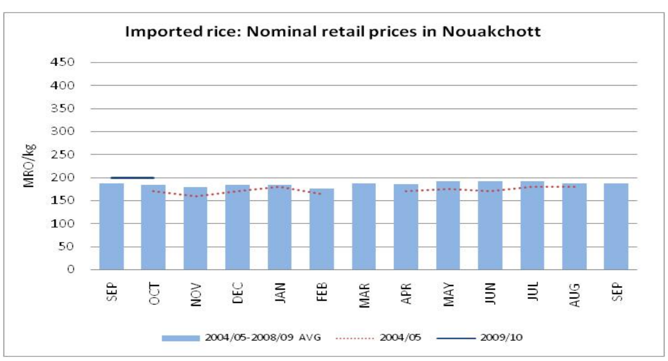
Monthly prices are supplied by FEWS NET enumerators, local government agencies, market information systems, UN agencies, NGOs, and other network and private sector partners.

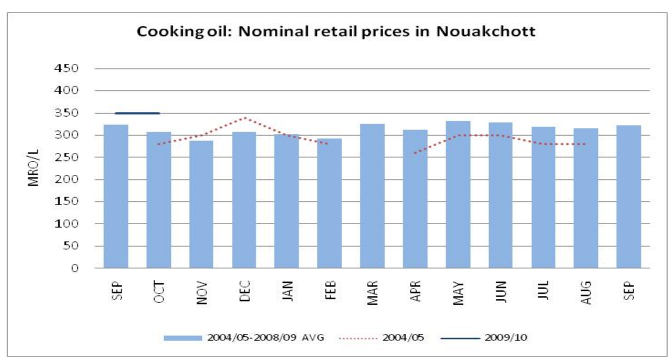
Wheat and local rice are the most important food commodities for the poorest households. Middle income and more wealthy households consume imported rice instead. The Socogim market in Nouakchott is the most important market in the country and has linkages to Senegal and Morocco.

*NOTE: Historic prices only available for the capital city market. Data collection now starting in other markets noted on the map.









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