Irregular rainfall affects regional Primera season crop production

KEY MESSAGES

- Due to production losses arising from irregular rainfall in July and August in surplus areas in Honduras, prices could steadily rise in Honduras and in neighboring countries towards the end of the year.

- The Primera harvest will begin in August/September and will allow households in El Salvador and Nicaragua to maintain Minimum (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity through December this year.

- Damage to the Primera harvest will reduce reserves by the end of the year, but the Postrera harvest and coffee labor are alternatives to help households meet their food needs. However, employment in the coffee harvest will be reduced due to the impact of rust, leaving this population with Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security outcomes in early 2014.

- The last two months of the rainy season will be above average, which may affect the Postrera harvest by incurring damages to both planting seasons for staple grain crops, impacting poor households mainly in Honduras which will experience Stressed conditions (IPC Phase 2). Because of localized damages to staple crops in El Salvador and Nicaragua, they will maintain Minimum acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 1).

- The re-seeding and recepa pruning (cutting trees back to a height of 10 inches off the ground) on coffee plantations affected by rust will result in reduced production areas, involving losses of approximately 455,550 jobs in the three countries in the region. This will have an impact on the migrant day labor population in subsistence coffee production areas.

CURRENT SITUATION

- According to reports from regional weather services, for a dry spell occurred during an average of 20 days between the last two weeks of July and the first two weeks of August, causing a significant impact on maize crops planted in the Primera season in the region’s driest areas. The cessation of rainfall was beneficial to the Primera season bean harvest.

- The anomalies in rainfall occurring during the growth and fruit-bearing stages for maize led to localized losses in specific areas of the three countries: in the departments of Olancho, Francisco Morazán, Comayagua, and El Paraíso in Honduras; in the departments of Madriz, Estelí, and Matagalpa in Nicaragua; and in the departments of La Unión, Morazán, San Miguel, and San Vicente in El Salvador.
Countries in this region plant their *Postrera* crops during the last half of August and the first half of September. During this time of year, beans account for the highest percentage of their annual production in each country.

In mid-August, subsistence households in all three countries start consuming *camagüa* maize (maize which has not yet reached physiological maturity) produced during Primera season harvest. This consumption typically signals the end of the lean season in August. However, in the areas of the dry corridor where households lost as much as 100 percent of their production, the lean season will not end as usual given the scant grain reserves from the Primera harvest. Households will be forced to rely entirely on the *Postrera* crop harvest in late November and early December.

Despite the critical lean season currently underway, retail prices have remained relatively stable. The greatest variations in maize prices are observed in Honduras and Nicaragua: 10 and 3 percent, respectively. Only slight price increases were recorded for red beans in both Honduras and Nicaragua. In El Salvador, both beans and maize showed minimal percentage variations, reflecting an increased stability in their basic food basket.

At this time of year, prices reach their highest in regional markets, and subsequently begin to decrease beginning in September through the February of the following year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZONE</th>
<th>CURRENT ANOMALIES</th>
<th>PROJECTED ANOMALIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REGIONAL</td>
<td>• The relative lack of rainfall in the last two weeks of July and the beginning of August has had a negative impact on the availability of water for planting Primera crops, primarily in the dry corridor where the damage to Primera maize and bean production is evident in all three countries.</td>
<td>• The prevalence of coffee rust in this region is expected to drastically decrease temporary employment opportunities for those households that regularly migrate in an effort to supplement their income and satisfy their basic needs for the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL SALVADOR</td>
<td>• The Eastern zone (La Unión, Morazán, San Miguel, and San Vicente) was affected by a drought that lasted for a period of between 23 and 27 days during the last two weeks of July and the first week of August.</td>
<td>• None to date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HONDURAS</td>
<td>• Damages occurring in the valleys where commercial crops are grown, i.e., areas supplying the national market, as well as demand from the livestock industry (primarily poultry and pigs).</td>
<td>• Damage to Primera crops in commercial production areas could affect national market supply and generate price increases in the markets of neighboring countries (Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICARAGUA</td>
<td>• The losses suffered by grain crops as a result of decreased rainfall in July and August were concentrated in localized areas of the country.</td>
<td>• None to date.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PROJECTED REGIONAL OUTLOOK THROUGH DECEMBER 2013**

Consumption of staple grains by poor households during the remainder of the year comes primarily from Primera harvest crops, with any shortfall covered by market purchases until the Postrera harvest. Consistent with the rain anomalies recorded during the first pentad of September (September 1-5, 2013), the start of the Postrera season was delayed by as much as 20 or more days in the eastern areas of Honduras and El Salvador, as well as in western areas of Nicaragua. These same areas were affected by the dry spell in July and August during the Primera season. This could affect crops planted in the Postrera season if the rainy season ends early in October.

*Primera* losses, combined with the likelihood that *Postrera* crops will be affected by excessive rainfall, and decreased opportunities for employment during the coffee harvest, it is possible that households in specific communities located
in the dry corridor of all three countries will be unable to satisfy their food needs towards the end of the year, placing them in Stressed food insecurity (IPC Phase 2).

September will see the greatest likelihood of impacts caused by a hurricane-related event in the Atlantic Basin, as suggested by the number and behavior of tropical storms over the past 100 years. So far, the hurricane season has not produced an event of any significance. Hurricane activity in the Pacific will continue through November, with the possibility that the harvest of Postrera crops may be affected.

**EL SALVADOR**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Affected by agricultural production</th>
<th>Affected by coffee rust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unión, Morazán, San Miguel and Usulután</td>
<td>Santa Ana, Ahuachapán, Sonsonate, La Libertad, San Vicente, Usulután, San Miguel and Morazán</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Livelihood zones:
- Zone 4: Eastern, with basic grains, livestock farming and remittances
- Zone 1: Basic grains and sale of labor

El Salvador’s Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) reported in August that the eastern area experienced an extremely intense period of drought, which extended into the central and southern portions of the east and less so as far as coast portions in the Central zone. In press releases published in El Salvador, the Chamber of Small and Medium-scale Producers has reported losses occurring in the departments of La Unión, Morazán, San Miguel, and Usulután. It is hoped that, with support provided by the government in the form of inputs and technical assistance for Postrera crops, either areas production will be expanded or yield more per area planted.

According to data presented at the PROMECAFE workshop held in San Salvador, it is estimated that 71 percent of the area devoted to coffee production in El Salvador (152,187 hectares) is currently affected by coffee rust. The damage caused during the 2013-2014 season will lead to the loss of 22,450 temporary coffee-harvest jobs.

The rapid assessment conducted by WFP in May 2013 revealed that many coffee-producing households lack food reserves due to 2012-2013 season losses from rust and the low yields from the Primera harvest. Estimates suggest that approximately 10,000 households in the affected areas will be impacted. It is expected that the food security situation of these households will probably worsen with the reduction in coffee yields for the 2013-2014 harvest.

Since the zones affected by the drought were concentrated in the eastern region of the country and the zones affected by coffee rust are located in the western area, and since households in these zones have food reserves from the Primera harvest, it is projected that no areas of El Salvador will be classified as Stressed, resulting in Minimal food insecurity (IPC Phase 1) for the last quarter of 2013.

**HONDURAS**

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

<table>
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<th>Departments</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olancho, Francisco Morazán, Comayagua and El Paraíso</td>
<td>Copán, Ocotepeque, Lempira, Norte de Santa Bárbara y Cortés, Santa Bárbara, Lempira e Intibucá, La Paz, Comayagua, and El Paraíso.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Livelihood zones:
- Zone 3: Vegetables and coffee
- Zone 5: Agro-industry
- Zone 8: Basic grains for subsistence
- Zone 9: Basic grains and forestry
- Zone 15: Coffee and basic grains
- Zone 8: Basic grains for subsistence
- Zone 15: Basic grains and coffee

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Farming’s (SAG) September 1-10 forecast in its Agro-meteorological Report No. 04 that in the northern portion of Olancho, the northern portion of Cortés, and the municipality of Tela, rainfall averaged between 40 and 60 mm. This constituted the lowest levels in the country during this period and it is expected to become a recurrent phenomenon in these areas for the remainder of the year.
According to data presented at the PROMECAFE workshop held on June 28 in San Pedro Sula, it is estimated that some 84,000 hectares were affected by coffee rust in this area, accounting for 30 percent of the total coffee area planted nationwide. The loss of approximately 300,000 coffee-related jobs is projected as a result of this situation. WFP, in coordination with the Technical Unit for Food and Nutritional Security (UTSAN), attached to the Office of the President, has identified 8,300 households in 11 departments that have been affected by the coffee rust crisis. A total of 636 MT of emergency food assistance has been distributed and a second round is currently in the planning stage, contingent on the results of the Food Security Assessment scheduled to take place in late September.

As a result of Primera production losses in the southern part of Honduras, household reserves will diminish. This situation is compounded by the fact that these households, which typically receive income from day labor during the coffee harvest from October through March, will also see a reduction in their income. This area will be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) beginning in early 2014.

**NICARAGUA**

**Table 3. Areas with anomalies in Nicaragua**

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-lying areas of Madriz, Nueva Segovia and Matagalpa (San Juan de Limay, Somoto, and Las Marias)</td>
<td>Low-lying areas of Madriz, Nueva Segovia and Matagalpa (San Juan de Limay, Somoto, and Las Marias)</td>
<td>Matagalpa, Nueva Segovia, Madriz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livelihood zones</td>
<td>Zone 3: Northwestern region – agro-livestock subsistence farming, livestock raising and alternative economies</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The images of the anomalies in the water requirement model and soil humidity showed losses in the above-mentioned departments. The field assessment conducted by FEWS NET and ACF-E during the last week of August confirmed that the drought-induced losses to Primera season maize crops were concentrated in the same areas affected by anomalies. This zone produces crops for household consumption and dry spells occur on a regular basis.

In Nicaragua’s Atlantic region, WFP is implementing two rounds of 30-day food distributions (100.64 MT) to benefit 7,957 individuals affected by flooding. The communities affected are inhabited primarily by the Misquito population, 95 percent of which are dependent on agriculture and fishing.

Approximately 44,267 coffee producers are responsible for Nicaragua’s coffee production, spanning a total area of 180,219 hectares, of which 37 percent is affected by coffee rust. Some 55.4 percent of the area is cultivated by small and medium-scale producers who work their land using family labor and local workers from surrounding communities. The remaining 45.6 percent is worked by large-scale producers (with landholdings in excess of 35 hectares), who generate sources of temporary employment primarily for subsistence and infra-subistence farmers who migrate seasonally to these coffee plantations.

Since the areas affected by the drought were minor in terms of area and population affected, and since households in these areas have reserves from their Primera harvest crops, Nicaragua will not classify any areas as Stressed. Accordingly, Minimal food insecurity (IPC Phase 1) is projected through the end of 2013.

**SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR**

![Seasonal Calendar Diagram](image-url)