Key Messages

- Above-normal precipitation and sufficient irrigation water availability led to Afghanistan’s ongoing 2012 cereal harvest likely being well above average.

- Extreme northern Badakhshan and the Wakhan Corridor are in an extended lean season until the harvest in September. This past year has been characterized by higher than normal livestock sales and livestock losses associated with the extremely cold temperatures from November 2011 to May 2012.

- In the central highlands, the potato and wheat harvests are expected to be near average. Along with remittances, households should be able to stock sufficient food for winter and spring. However, the delay in harvest caused by cold temperatures in the spring and early summer may limit the amount of fodder grown this year and reduce fodder availability for the winter.

Seasonal calendar and critical events

![Seasonal calendar and critical events](image)

Source: FEWS NET Afghanistan

Note: Newly displaced populations are classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and their numbers and locations appear in Table 2.

For more information on FEWS NET’s Food Insecurity Severity Scale, see [www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale](http://www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale).

Most likely food security scenario, July to December 2012

National overview

The 2012 cereal harvest is currently underway. Following the below average cereal harvest in 2011, the 2011/2012 wet season started early. The start of the wet season was on time or early in most areas with some rains having come by October 2011 in many areas. The early or on time rains facilitated land preparation and the planting of winter wheat and other winter crops. However, in some areas, the early precipitation prevented farmers from planting winter wheat as the second crops were still in the fields at that time. Very cold winter temperatures also set in earlier than usual in late 2011, so some low temperatures prevented planting of winter wheat in December. There was also a dry spell in December.
By the middle of January, snowfall had returned to average to above average levels. Precipitation levels remained average or above for much of the rest of the wet season. Accumulated precipitation during the 2011/2012 October to June wet season was above the long term average (2002-2011) in all of the river basins and in every province except Kunduz Province, using the satellite-derived Rainfall Estimate-2 (RFE2) (Figure 2).

Lower than average temperatures began in December 2011 over much of Afghanistan and persisted until June in many areas. The lower temperatures prevented some planting of winter wheat in December, and they also delayed the planting of spring crops in some areas. For the planted crops, the below average temperatures slowed the growth of crops during the spring from March to June. In some higher elevation areas in the central highlands and the northeastern highlands, farmers reported in the spring that they were not expecting any harvest as it appeared that their crops would not recover from the cold temperatures. However, by June when temperatures got warmer, the wheat crop’s growth accelerated. The warmer temperatures were accompanied by unusually late rainfall in June and early July. The late rain has been crucial for the continued growth of rainfed crops. Even in the higher elevations of the central highlands and the northeastern mountains, the wheat crops have reached the heading stage.

The lower temperatures preserved much of the snow pack for longer than normal. The snowmelt continues to provide sufficient irrigation water in the vast majority of irrigated areas. The irrigation water and slower than usual snowmelt has provided water for intensive agriculture including horticultural production, for both winter and spring grain crops, and for the ongoing second plantings of cash crops, fodder, and secondary grains. More than 80 percent of Afghanistan’s water is surface water which derives from snowmelt. Typically during the dry season from June to September, water availability for irrigation and for human consumption becomes scarcer. However, so far this summer, access to irrigation water and drinking water remains sufficient.

In addition to the positive effects on agricultural activities, the above normal precipitation and lower temperatures this year contributed to good pasture conditions. While spring arrived late and was colder than usual in 2012, pasture conditions were good. As both pasture and water were widely available, livestock body conditions remain normal. The normal body conditions along with increasing wages have led to normal demand for livestock. Thus livestock prices all over the country were above prices from last year, particularly during the spring time as households anticipated an above normal harvest and good pasture conditions. For example, in Mazar in a surplus-producing area in northern Afghanistan, the price of a one year old sheep is 62 percent above the four-year average.

As the first set of crops, dominated by winter and spring wheat, have generally been developing well since March or April, daily agricultural labor wages are as much as double last year’s rates for harvest labor. Agricultural wages are particularly improved in northern Afghanistan due to a sharp increase in labor demand, especially in rainfed areas. In cases of in-kind
payment, some laborers are asking for up to a twenty to thirty percent share of the harvest when assisting the landowner with harvesting a large, standing cereal crop by hand in rainfed areas.

In June, wheat prices across Afghanistan were relatively stable compared to the past several months. However, they are decreasing by very slight amounts from May to June in some northern markets such as Mazar. In many cases, the prices in June were below the five-year average and prices from last year.

In the lowlands, the 2012 cereal harvest started in the middle of May and has been completed. In the midlands, the harvest is still underway. Harvesting in the central highlands and extreme northeastern Afghanistan should begin by August or September though in the very highest elevations, it may be as late as October. Judging from the high demand for labor so far this season, the harvest in both rainfed and irrigated areas still appears to be well above-average.

In areas where the winter wheat or other winter crop harvest is complete, the planting of second crops began in July. In intensive irrigated areas, second crops such as rice and cotton are being planted due to good water availability. In rainfed areas, less water-intensive crops are being planted for the second planting. Most of these crops are becoming established and in average condition. In northern Afghanistan, a melon fly infestation has attacked the already planted melons. Melons are an important cash crop in this region, and they are also consumed by households that grow them. They can be stored until December, and melon, in some areas, is dried to diversify the winter and lean season diet. Watermelons in northern Afghanistan are unaffected by this pest, but large-scale melon losses to the melon fly are expected. The outbreak has not been reported in southern Afghanistan where both the melon and watermelon crops are reported to be developing well and harvesting has already started in July in some areas and will continue through September.

As a result of all the rainfall, the ongoing harvest, high agricultural labor availability, and relatively stable staple food prices, the vast majority of Afghans are consuming a seasonally normal diet. In areas where livestock are kept, milk is generally available at a sufficient level. Labor wages and remittances are keeping consumption at usual levels for market-dependent households. As such, most of Afghanistan is currently classified as No Acute Food Insecurity (IPC Phase 1). However, households that have suffered major losses of livelihood assets or crops are classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2). These households include internally displaced persons (IDPs) recently displaced by spring floods or by the ongoing conflict. Also, households that were deported from Iran and Pakistan and have returned to Afghanistan or that have voluntarily repatriated, primarily to urban areas, are still in the process of trying to establish new livelihoods. Along the Amu River, households that have lost their homes to and land to erosion are classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2). Also, some households who have lost large amounts of their crop to hail may be classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2). Most of the Stressed (IPC Phase 2) households do not constitute less than one out of five households in the areas in which they live or to which they have been displaced.

The most likely scenario for July to December 2012 is based on the following assumptions:

- From June to August, summer floods in eastern and southeastern Afghanistan will be at a lower level than in 2010 and 2011 due to the weak Indian monsoon.
- The 2012 cereal harvests both from irrigated and from rainfed areas is likely to be above average. While it is unlikely to surpass the 30 year high of 2009, some early estimates are that the harvest may near that level of total production.
- The potato harvest in the central highlands including Bamyan province will be average to above average. This will lead to average to above average market availability of potatoes for September to December.
- As this year’s harvest will boost availability, local wheat prices are expected to remain lower than the five-year average and last year through September. Prices may be especially low in the northern markets.
- The August to September spring wheat harvest in Kazakhstan will likely be slightly below average and will be well below the 2011 bumper crop due to reduced area planted and relatively poorer seasonal performance. However, substantial wheat stocks from the 2011 bumper harvest remain. Afghanistan’s import needs are also lower, so no disruptions to wheat and wheat flour imports from Kazakhstan are expected. However, as the price of wheat and wheat flour from Kazakhstan will increase, this will contribute to higher priced imports during the stocking period from October to December.
The March to June Rabi winter wheat harvest in Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan produced an above average amount of wheat though likely less than last year’s bumper harvest. As the harvest was above average, Pakistan will not institute any new restrictions on wheat and wheat flour trade with Afghanistan.

Civil insecurity and lawlessness along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border will not be at high enough of a level to significantly discourage traders or disrupt other normal livelihood strategies.

During October and November, household typically stock wheat and wheat flour for the winter. As demand increases and some wheat and/or wheat flour imports from Kazakhstan and Pakistan will still need to occur this year, wheat flour prices are expected to increase from their present low levels to marginally higher than the five-year average from October to December due to higher prices from the source markets.

Irrigation water availability will remain above normal from now to December. Households that did not manage to plant winter wheat or spring wheat due to low temperatures planted higher value cash crops, and the performance of these crops such as cotton, sesame, chickpeas, rice, and melon will generally be average to above average. The exception to this is in northern Afghanistan, for areas that planted melon, melon fly infestation will lead to below average yields and to melon crop losses. The northern melon crop will be below average. However, southern horticultural crops such as melons, watermelons, pomegranate, and grapes should be near average.

While cotton prices are expected to remain well below prices from last year, prices will still be near or above the longer term averages and more than the agricultural expenses of households that grow cotton as a cash crop.

Production of second crops will be above usual in areas that have already harvested winter crops and spring wheat as water availability and soil moisture remain good. However, in higher elevation areas where the initial wheat harvest has been delayed, many households will not have an opportunity to plant second crops. The reduced growing period will lead to low yields and lack of maturation before winter for some households that choose to plant second crops later in the season.

Labor opportunities for the harvest, for planting of second crops, for harvest of second crops, for weeding of second crops, and for planting of winter crops in the agricultural surplus-producing areas are expected to be above normal. Labor migrants from agricultural production deficit areas are expected to gain more wages than usual due to this high labor demand.

Above average volumes of in-kind payments for agricultural labor, higher than average cash wages for agricultural labor, and good yields on rainfed, sharecropped land will allow landless households to stock adequate amounts of food this year during the October to December stocking period.

Livestock prices will remain at their current levels then seasonally increase in September and October as sales for Eid Qurban in late October begin. Better off households usually slaughter an animal on Eid Qurban.

Migrant laborers from Afghanistan currently living in Pakistan and Iran will continue to find some labor opportunities and provide remittances at seasonally normal times. However, the level of remittances from Iran will be less than average due to macroeconomic problems in Iran and some appreciation of the Afghan afghani (AFN) against the Iranian rial (IRR). However, the reduction will not lead to a total lack of remittances for remittance-dependent households.

Populations displaced by conflict, populations displaced by flooding or other natural disasters, and former refugees returning from Iran and Pakistan will have access to humanitarian assistance. The amount of humanitarian assistance available to these populations will be sufficient to support a minimally adequate diet.

The governments of Iran and Pakistan will not forcibly deport a large number of Afghan refugees, including those who lack refugee status identification documents, between July and December.

Military operations and civil insecurity will continue in many parts of Afghanistan throughout the scenario period. However, conflict will not be on a scale to significantly alter the ability of traders to serve markets throughout Afghanistan or that leads to a large number of newly displaced people. Conflict levels will reduce with the onset of winter in December.

The wet season is assumed to begin near to on time around October and to start at a near average level of precipitation.

Temperatures may be higher than last year during the winter wheat planting period from September to December.
• Improved seed availability is expected to be above average. Around 10,000 MT of improved wheat seeds are expected to be sold by the private sector. Poor households will have above average access to improved wheat seeds from the anticipated distribution of 20,000 MT by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) of Afghanistan and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

• With good irrigation water availability and near average precipitation, winter wheat planted area would likely be near average. Planted area for other winter crops such as barley and poppy would also likely be near average.

**Extreme northern Badakhshan and the Wakhan Corridor**

This area of the country has been one of the most affected by the below normal winter temperatures and the extension of winter temperatures into the spring. In September 2011, the rainfed harvest, primarily wheat, was mostly a failure. Households typically consume stocks from their own agricultural production through March. In order to compensate the loss of most of the 2011 harvest, poor households sold a significant number of their livestock to be able to purchase and stock food from the market for the 2011/2012 winter and lean season.

Usually by April, livestock births would occur, pasture would be available, and milk would be a substantial component of the diet in addition to stocks from the previous harvest or new market purchases. Households would start seeking labor either in the zone or nearby to fund additional market purchases during the spring months. Some wild foods would be gathered. However, this year, households had fewer livestock. They lost some livestock during the winter to harsh temperatures and to lack of fodder to keep livestock healthy enough to survive. Abortions and losses over the winter were likely high. Subsequently, during the spring time, a noticeable number of the new born livestock died because of the extreme cold temperatures and the poor health of lactating females. Milk availability was very low. In addition, the above normal snowfall during the spring time limited market supplies to these areas as roads and paths were impassable. Not having access to markets, to migratory or local labor opportunities, and having more limited than usual access to wild foods all reduced households strategies to diversify and improve their diets beyond their remaining food stocks. Poor households’ ability to cope was curtailed as most usual opportunities were limited by reduced mobility. By May 2012, many poor households may have run out of coping strategies such as drawing down savings or using credit to access food as well as having exhausted their household food stocks. However, by late May and early June, road access improved as temperatures rose. This enabled humanitarian assistance to reach the poor, but it also increased opportunities for labor, for market access, and for normal livelihood activities to commence. Right now, poor households are receiving some assistance, and this assistance is necessary to prevent a consumption gap. With minimally adequate consumption, poor households are currently classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2) but they are dependent upon humanitarian assistance to reach this level of food consumption.

At this time of year, households’ typically rely on livestock products and market purchases funded by casual labor wages and income from livestock sales. Unlike other parts of the country, extreme northern Badakhshan and the Wakhan Corridor are in an extended lean season as their typical spring sources of food and income were not available and the local harvest will not take place until September, having been delayed from August due to the cold temperatures.

In a typical year, from September to March poor households’ largest single source of food is their own agricultural production, primarily wheat and potato. Income for market purchases to stock for winter in October and November typically comes from sales of livestock and their wool and skins during the same time period. This year, households will have more limited income from livestock sales due to unusually high sales last year, losses of livestock during the winter, and losses of young animals this spring. However, labor opportunities in neighboring provinces are available at an above average level. Casual, agricultural labor wages or in-kind payments are also above average. Households will likely substitute additional labor to help cover the reduced income from livestock sales and products. The harvest prospects within the zone have improved since the spring, and while the harvest may be late, good soil moisture means that the harvest will likely be near average within the zone. Also, prices of wheat and wheat flour for building stocks will not be particularly high in October and November as they are expected only to be slightly above the five-year average. The labor wages should allow households to stock at a near average level. Thus, following the local harvest and some shift of income sources, households should be able to have normal food consumption from October to December and no longer be reliant upon humanitarian assistance. For this period, households will likely improve to No Acute Food Insecurity (IPC Phase 1) though their still fragile livelihoods may lead to problems later in the spring as livestock production will not be fully recovered by March or April 2013.
Amu River irrigated cereals and oilseed livelihood zone

The vast majority of households of all wealth groups in this zone are classified as No Acute Food Insecurity (IPC Phase 1) from now until December. The obtained harvest is above average. The agricultural daily wages have increased to AFN 500 per day during the harvest time in June and July. These wages may be highest they have been in the last ten years. Livestock prices are higher than last year. However, in some of the northern villages along the Amu River, higher than usual water levels have washed away both agricultural lands and houses. Since this spring, residents of 140 villages have been displaced. 800 additional residential houses are at the risk of washing away and of being displaced in July and August. Every summer, the Amu River erodes significant acreage of agricultural lands and many houses. However, this year the level of water in Amu River is much higher than the previous several years because of the above normal snowfall and rainfall in the mountains from where Amu River stems in northeastern Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The erosion results in a permanent livelihood change for the affected poor households that have lost their houses and land. Better off households often buy new land nearby if they are affected.

As a high potential agricultural area, the agricultural land and own production is the main source of both food and income. Although erosion is slow onset, and the population at risk usually has the opportunity to evacuate and take their moveable assets, households displaced by the flooding experience a permanent disruption to their current livelihood. They require time to find an alternative livelihood nearby or to permanently migrate to and settle in urban areas. Affected households this year received immediate humanitarian assistance, but most of them are currently dependent on assistance to meet their food and non-food needs. Affected households are classified as Stressed (IPC phase 2) over the coming 6 months as they rebuild their livelihoods. The risk of additional displacements from erosion ends in August when the water level in the Amu River decreases to well below the riverbanks.

Higher elevations of the central highlands

In a typical year, poor households’ source of food during June, July, and August are market purchase and livestock production. Incomes from internal and external labor migration fund market purchases. In September, October, and November, the primary food source in a typical year is own agricultural production. By December, households are primarily dependent upon their own stocks and any additional local market purchases.

Income from internal labor migration this season appears to be normal as labor demand is high outside of the central highlands. However, income from international labor migration, primarily to Iran, may have been reduced compared to previous years due to the relatively poor economic conditions in Iran this year as result of additional financial embargoes. However, anecdotal reports indicate that the reduction in remittances from Iran is a reduction from usual, but it is not a lack of remittances or a catastrophic drop in the level received by poor households. Remittances from Iran allow households to continue purchasing food. In addition to seasonally normal sources of food and income, humanitarian assistance in response to last year’s below average harvest is still underway in many areas of the central highlands. Food security outcomes during July, August, and September are classified as No Acute Food Insecurity (IPC Phase 1) due to good incomes from labor migration within Afghanistan and from abroad.

The persistence of below normal temperatures throughout the 2011/2012 wet season slowed down the wheat crop growth to the extent that many farmers believed that there would be no harvest this year. However, by the onset of dry season when temperatures warmed up, the wheat crops’ growth accelerated and recovered. As a result, farmers’ perceptions have changed and many are now anticipating a near normal harvest. However, the below normal temperatures have resulted in a one month delay in the harvest time from August to September. The delay in harvesting the wheat crop may prevent second crop cultivation which tends to be maize. Nonetheless, the contribution of maize to households’ overall food supply or as a source of cash income is not very large. However, maize plants are frequently stored as fodder for the winter feeding of livestock. The loss of alfalfa to extreme cold during the early spring has already complicated fodder availability for many households.

From October to December, households will primarily depend on their own normal wheat and potato harvests. Also, livestock will be sold in September and October as livestock prices increase in anticipation of Eid Qurban. Income from livestock sales, wool sales, remittances, temporary labor migration, and other sources of income will fund market purchases for stocking food for winter and the lean season. Wheat flour prices are expected to be slightly higher than the five-year average and unlikely to increase significantly, so households should be able to cover both current needs and the need for stocks from their income. As a result, households will be classified as No Acute Food Insecurity (IPC Phase 1).
Hail-affected areas in Khust and Paktya provinces

In June, hail storms in Khust and Paktya provinces damaged the wheat fields. This has reduced the wheat harvest which started in July by up to 50 percent compared to the average harvest. The reduction in the harvest is not expected to lead to a significant food consumption gap. Most households consume food from market purchases funded by remittances from the Gulf States. As the complete harvest was not destroyed by the hail, even the very poor are likely to maintain access to wheat and other food through December. Households who do not receive remittances, primarily a small group of the very poor, may be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) during the winter and the lean season though from January to April.

Table 1. Events, which could change the most likely food security scenario

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<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Impact on food security outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationwide, but particularly market-dependent and landless households</td>
<td>A sharp increase in wheat market prices as international food commodity prices rise</td>
<td>The sudden and somewhat unexpected increase in wheat and wheat flour prices would limit access to food for households who rely on market purchase. While fewer households are expected to be market-dependent this season, the effects of high prices could be especially harmful during the October to December stocking period when many rural Afghans buy their food stocks for winter and the lean season.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban areas</td>
<td>Pakistan and/or Iran forcibly repatriate Afghan refugees</td>
<td>If Iran and/or Pakistan forcibly repatriate some or all of the five million Afghan refugees, urban areas would likely have difficult supplying food through markets and supplying labor opportunities for the large influx of new residents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>Significant deterioration of security or increase in military operations</td>
<td>If the security situation deteriorates to the extent that Afghan traders are unable or unwilling to move food commodities between provinces, this could lead to higher prices, problems of availability in markets, and the inability to export high value goods such as cotton and fruit. Security would likely also limit labor migration which would reduce income and remittance levels.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern and southeastern Afghanistan</td>
<td>Severe summer floods</td>
<td>If the rains from the Indian monsoon unexpectedly increased towards the end of August, then severe floods could occur, likely leading to displacements and damaged or lost crops.</td>
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<td>Western Afghanistan and the central highlands</td>
<td>The Iranian rial (IRR) substantially depreciates against the Afghan afghani (AFN)</td>
<td>Remittances and labor income from Iran will proportionally decrease, so households that receive this income will have reduced purchasing power and reduced ability to access food from markets.</td>
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