

HAITI: Food Security Outlook Update

August 2012

Poor spring crop harvest, rising prices, and passage of Hurricane Isaac heighten food insecurity

- Tropical Storm Isaac struck Nippes and the Western and Southeastern Departments, damaging farm infrastructure and destroying crops. In areas where drought conditions caused spring crops to fail, food insecurity has increased.
- Forecasts by major weather centers predict normal seasonal rainfall between August and November, which should allow for an average winter harvest.
- As typical for this time of the year, seasonal jobs are available for farm workers, particularly in the Les Cayes Plain and the Artibonite Valley areas where the country's largest irrigation schemes are located.
- Food prices in many parts of the country are stable, but are trending upwards in certain large markets like Croix-des-Bossales and Les Cayes. The combined effects of this trend and poor crop performance will trigger a deterioration in the food security situation of poor households in areas such as the Northwest, the Southeast, Gonave, and urban pockets of Port-au-Prince, who are in IPC Phase 2 (stressed).

Rainfall

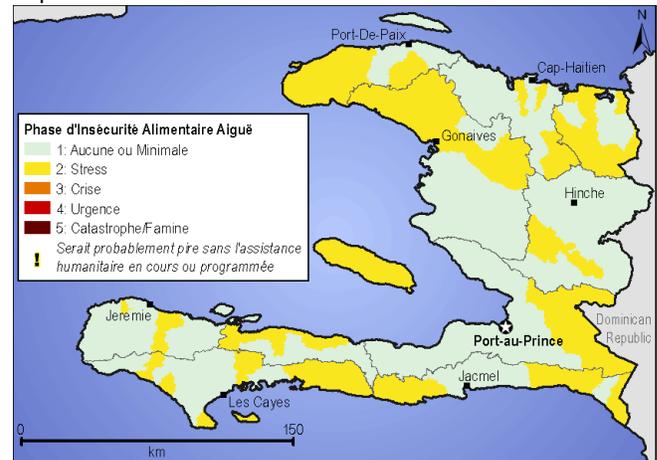
Tropical Storm Isaac swept through the Southeastern and Nippes area on August 25th, producing 85 to 100 kilometer-per-hour winds. Available data suggests significant damage to the farming sector. The government and its partners are currently examining possible assistance measures.

The International Research Institute for Climate and Society's forecast for normal rainfall activity across the country from August to November has been corroborated by other weather centers. Prior to the passage of Hurricane Isaac, field reports showed regular rainfall since early August on the Southern Peninsula, the lower Central Plateau area, the West, and the Artibonite. Outside of humid mountain areas where the second rainy season began in early August, drought conditions in the northern, single-cropping plain areas and dry agropastoral areas extended into the middle of August. In these areas, the second rainy season normally begins at the end of August or the beginning of September.

Crop production

Pending the final results of CNSA's (the Haitian National Food Security Agency) July harvest assessment, preliminary data shows a poor spring crop harvest for this past season, largely due to rainfall deficits between May and June.

Figure 1. Estimated food security outcomes, August - September 2012

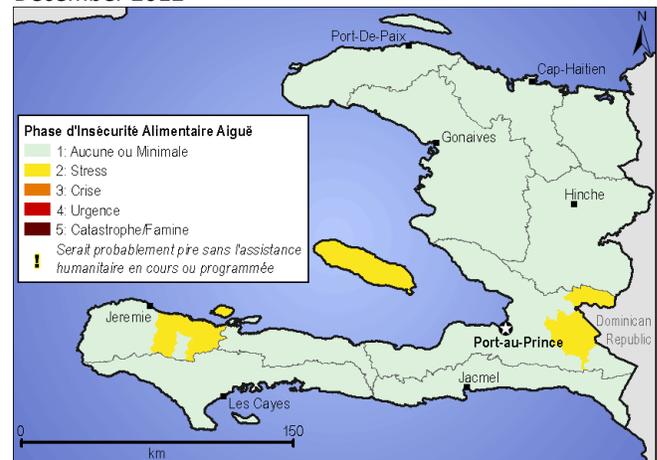


Source: FEWS NET

For more information on the IPC Acute Food Insecurity Scale, see:

www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

Figure 2. Estimated food security outcomes, October - December 2012



Source: FEWS NET

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This report is an update of the Food Security Outlook published in July 2012 assessing food security conditions in Haiti through the end of December 2012.

While the entire country has been affected by the dry conditions, the Northern and Northeastern regions, municipalities on the western edge of the Northwestern region, and certain municipalities in Grand-Anse and the Southeast have been especially hard hit. Ministry of Agriculture representatives in these regions have estimated losses at between 50 and 70 percent of the average. In contrast, harvests in the Les Cayes Plain area, certain parts of Nippes, the lower Central Plateau area, the Southeast, and in irrigation schemes were very close to average.

Rainfall activity in the first dekad of August helped to revive farming activities for the second growing season, which began in August. In the Southern Peninsula, especially in the Les Cayes Plain area, agricultural activities such as plowing, planting, and transplanting are underway for the production of corn, rice, and produce. Bean crops in the humid mountain areas, such as Nippes, are in various stages of growth and development, ranging from the seedling stage to the maturation stage. Sorghum and sweet potato crops in dry-farming and agropastoral areas are being planted.

Rice growers in irrigated areas of the Artibonite Valley and the North have started cropping activities, with the first harvests scheduled to begin in November. With the help of the Ministry of Agriculture, chemical fertilizer has become more affordable and is now selling for 900 gourdes per 50 kg sack compared with 1,250 gourdes back in June. The Ministry of Agriculture will help provide farmers with access to over 25,000 metric tons of chemical fertilizer between July and December, which is a much larger quantity than in previous years, by offering a 50 percent subsidy for fertilizer purchases. This subsidy will be 20 percent greater than the previous government subsidy that was in place through June. There is good water availability for irrigation, which bodes well for a near-average rice harvest for this growing season. However for the summer growing season in humid mountain areas, there has been no subsidies for bean seed purchases, which have become expensive. For example, a sack of beans in Sainte Suzanne costs 225 gourdes, which is 50 gourdes more than the price in August of last year. The Ministry of Agriculture is taking the usual steps of provide seed and fertilizer to help bolster the winter bean harvest.

Field preparation and maintenance work are creating jobs for farm laborers, particularly in the intensive farming areas of Les Cayes Plain and the Artibonite Valley, although job availability this year is less than usual. A farm worker in the Les Cayes Plain area is paid a daily wage of approximately 100 gourdes for five hours of work. Normal daily wage rates in the Artibonite Valley range from 100 to 200 gourdes for a five or six-hour work day, depending on the municipality. A rice grower needs 150 workers per hectare per day to effectively perform all necessary farm work from rice planting to harvest. Preparations are underway for labor-intensive public works programs in areas vulnerable to tropical storm damage. These programs should create minimum wage jobs for the poor that pay 200 gourdes per day.

Trends in food prices

Though small, the July/August harvest helped stabilize or lower prices in many parts of the country throughout the month of July. This trend continued into the first two weeks of August in areas such as the Central Plateau. However in other areas of the country, such as in the South where harvests were larger, prices are currently rising. According to a CRS bulletin, prices for imported rice and local ground corn are up from last month by four and 17 percent, respectively. While the rising price of rice is normal, the price increases for corn is likely due to speculation resulting from this season's small corn harvest. This upward trend in prices affects imports as well as local crops. A six-pound sack of locally grown black beans is now selling for 200 gourdes, compared with an average July price of 185 gourdes. The price of wheat flour is also up from 85 to 95 gourdes. This trend has been observed at most large markets, such as the Croix des Bossales market in Port-au-Prince. According to tabulated average price data for the last five years, prices for certain crops such as imported rice tend to rise in August, while corn prices tend to fall. Bean prices also tend to rise in August, though this year's rise has been steeper and more rapid than usual. Price fluctuations in high-production areas like the Les Cayes Plain could heighten food insecurity levels in areas especially hard hit, first, by the drought and more recently, by Tropical Storm Isaac. The spring crop failure, combined with the damage caused by Isaac, will expose poor households to markets supplied with low levels of locally grown crops and rising prices for imported products. Other municipalities in the Southeast, Nippes, the North, the Central Plateau, and the Artibonite are in a similar situation.

Northwest

Crop production in the Northwestern Department was affected by extended dry conditions, resulting in extremely low spring crop yields, particularly for corn and beans. Rainfall activity since the beginning of August has helped revive farming activities. Land preparation activities are underway in the plains, with reports that market garden crops are currently being planted in mountain areas. However, after the previous poor harvests, farmers do not have the means to purchase seeds. To assist farmers, the Ministry of Agriculture has mounted a labor-intensive public works program extending through the end of September that targets local populations in Baie de Henne, Jean Rabel, Bombardopolis, and Chansolme.

Markets are stocked mostly with imports, though certain local crops (breadfruits, mangoes, and avocados) are also available. However, even with the availability of these local crops, prices for imported food are uncharacteristically high. For example, a sack of imported rice is currently selling for 150 gourdes which is 50 percent higher than last year. A gallon of cooking oil is selling for 300 gourdes, up from 250 gourdes in the first quarter of this year and 200 gourdes at the same time last year. The price of imported ground corn has also risen to 100 gourdes per sack, compared with 70 gourdes last month and 50 gourdes last year. Locally grown beans are also more expensive, selling for 210 gourdes per sack, compared with 180 gourdes in recent months and 150 gourdes last year.

The main sources of income for the poor are charcoal production, small-scale commerce, and paid labor. However, demand is low and real income from these occupations is insufficient to meet the food needs of poor households, who will remain in IPC Phase 2: Stress until the beginning of October. Conditions could improve as of October if rainfall activity continues and there is a good harvest. However, conditions could also deteriorate during this time if prices continue to climb.

Northeast

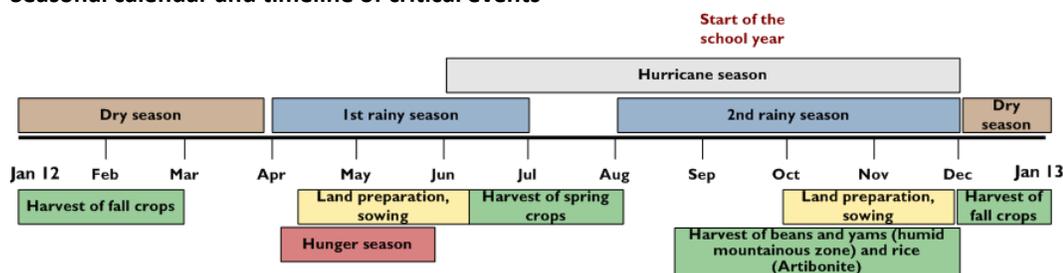
Local authorities report that Terrier-Rouge, Capotille, Caracol, and Trou-du-Nord are the four municipalities hardest hit by the May and June drought conditions that have continued into the second dekad of August. Rains typically begin in early September in these municipalities. As usual, land preparation activities should get underway by the end of August for corn planting and in September for groundnuts. In contrast, the humid mountain areas have received regular rainfall, filling rivers that are used to irrigate the rice-growing plain areas of Ouanaminthe, F  rier, and Fort-Libert  . With minimal farming activities at the moment, farm workers are mainly inactive, except for those engaged in charcoal production and those migrating to the Dominican Republic. Those who travel over the border are able to earn the equivalent of 230 gourdes plus two meals for eight hours of farm labor. In Haiti, farm laborers usually earn 125 gourdes plus one meal for five hours of work, but there are very few job opportunities in this area.

Food prices have been stable since June of this year, although price levels are above the five-year average. Most market supplies consist of imports. After losing their harvests for the past two seasons, farmers in dry-farming areas have no food reserves, and are basically relying on income from charcoal sales, paid labor, and small-scale commerce. Their incomes are lower than usual due to the July harvest failure and reduced farming activities. A majority of poor households, particularly those unable to travel across the border to work in the Dominican Republic, will be in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) between August and September.

Southeast

Since the beginning of August, there has been rainfall activity in all parts of the region. This region previously suffered from an extended drought that had caused large corn and bean crop losses. In the municipality of Anse-   Pitre, losses are estimated to be close to 70 percent. The Mapou and St Michel plain areas of Belle-Anse had near-average harvests, in contrast to the high losses in Calumette and Baie d’Orange. Farmers in the municipalities of Baint and La Vall  e suffered large losses of corn and bean crops planted in April. While certain municipalities like Cayes-Jacmel and Marigot were less affected by the drought, the entire Southeastern Department was hard hit by Tropical Storm Isaac which, in general, affected all areas of economic activity and could jeopardize upcoming harvests between October and December. Virtually all markets will be stocked mainly with imports throughout this period. The poorest households will be forced to resort to migration or to selling off household assets. Without the immediate start-up of labor-intensive public works programs or other cash transfer programs, food security conditions for very poor and poor households will be “stressed.”

Seasonal calendar and timeline of critical events



Source: FEWS NET