



# GIIEWS Country Brief

## Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Reference Date: 25-July-2017

### FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT

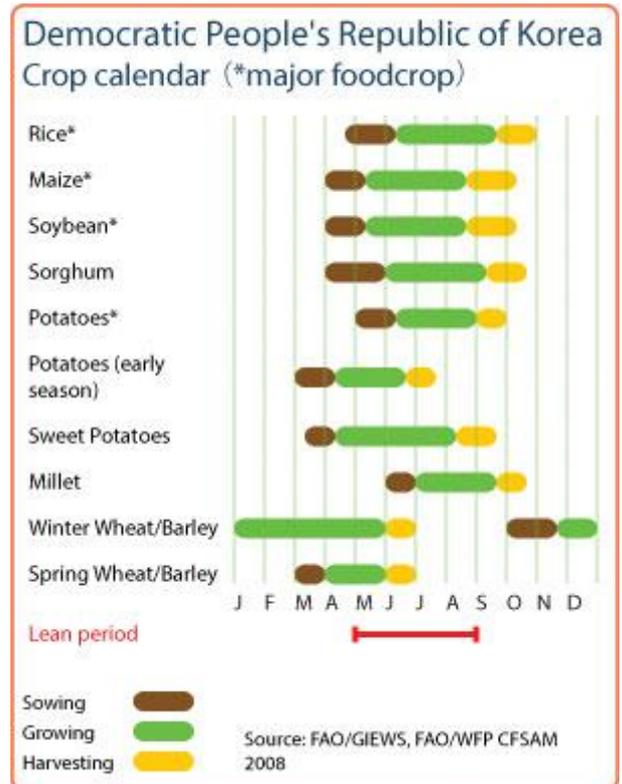
- Unfavourable prospects for 2017 main season food production
- The 2016/17 aggregate food production increased from previous year's reduced level
- Severe drought raises serious food security concerns for large numbers of people

### Unfavourable prospects for 2017 main season food<sup>1</sup> production

A severe dry spell from April to June has acutely constrained planting activities for the 2017 main season and adversely affected yield potential of the early-planted crops. Provinces of South and North Pyongan, South and North Hwanghae and Nampo City, which collectively account for close to two-thirds of the overall main cereal production, were the most affected. Although a detailed assessment of the crop damage is not yet available, early official estimates, provided by the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) on 23 June, indicate that about 50 000 hectares of cropland have been severely affected by the prolonged dry spell. This includes about 30 000 hectares of paddy fields and over 20 000 hectares of maize. Although the early estimate of the drought-affected area amounts to only around 5 percent of the total national planted area for the main season paddy and maize crops, these figures are likely to have increased significantly due to poor rains until the end of June. Other 2017 main season crops, including spring potatoes and soybeans, are also expected to be adversely affected by the drought.

### The 2016/17 food production<sup>2</sup> increased from previous year's reduced level

The aggregate 2016/17 food crop production is estimated by the FAO at 5.96 million tonnes (in cereal equivalent and paddy terms), 10 percent higher than the 2015/16 reduced level. The 2016 main season food crop production is estimated at 5.44 million tonnes, a 14 percent rebound from the 2015 drought-reduced level. The year-on-year increase is mostly attributed to a 30 percent recovery in 2016 paddy output, estimated at 2.54 million tonnes. At this level, however, paddy output in 2016 is still well below the output gathered between 2012 and 2014. Similarly to paddy, the output of other crops also rebounded from the last year's low level. The 2016 production of soybeans is officially estimated to have increased by 28 percent to 282 000 tonnes, while the output of the 2016 main season



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Food crops production<sup>1</sup>

|                                | 2015/16      |              | 2016/17 estimate |           | change<br>2015/16 -<br>2016/17 |
|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|
|                                | 000 tonnes   |              | percent          |           |                                |
| Rice (paddy)                   | 1 946        | 2 536        |                  | 30        |                                |
| Maize (including sloping land) | 2 491        | 2 398        |                  | -4        |                                |
| Wheat and barley               | 133          | 60           |                  | -55       |                                |
| Others                         | 859          | 962          |                  | -17       |                                |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>5 429</b> | <b>5 956</b> |                  | <b>10</b> |                                |

<sup>1</sup> Includes rice, cereals, soybeans and potatoes in cereal equivalent.  
Note: percentage change calculated from unrounded data.  
Source: FAO/GIEWS Country Cereal Balance Sheets

potatoes is set at 274 000 tonnes, more than 60 percent above the level of 2015. Output of other crops, including sorghum, millet and buckwheat, remained close to last year's high level. The 2016 maize output is officially estimated to have decreased by 4 percent to 2.2 million tonnes, as a result of a small contraction in the area planted and yields, mainly due to flood damages in the North Hamgyong province. As for the 2016/17 early season, the prolonged period of dry weather from April to June 2017, a critical period of grain filling, has negatively affected maturing crops, considerably reducing yields. Pending a more detailed official assessment, the FAO lowered the initial production forecast and currently estimates the 2016/17 early season crop production at 310 000 tonnes (cereal equivalent), over 30 percent less than in 2016. The early season potato production is estimated by the FAO at 250 000 tonnes, 20 percent down from the previous year's level, while the small wheat and barley harvest is forecast at about 60 000 tonnes, less than half of the last year's level.

### Severe drought raises serious food security concerns for large numbers of people

FAO forecasts the total cereal import requirements in 2016/17 (November/October) at 458 000 tonnes. Assuming the official import target of 200 000 tonnes of cereals is met, there is an uncovered deficit of 258 000 tonnes for the current marketing year. This food gap is lower than the level of the 2015/16 marketing year, but still higher than the 2012/13 and 2014/15 levels.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) remains the main source of food for around 18 million people, 70 percent of the total population. Given the dependence on national cereal production, the drop in the 2016/17 early season output worsened the food insecurity for a large proportion of the population. Although the early season harvest is relatively small, accounting for about 10 percent of the total annual cereal production, these crops are an important source of food during the lean season, which lasts from May to September. With expectations of reduced production of the main 2017 season crop, the food security situation is likely to deteriorate in the 2017/18 marketing year.

### Immediate assistance

Most of the country's population is critically dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. At this point, it is vital that farmers receive appropriate and timely agricultural input assistance, including irrigation equipment, such as water pumps and sprinklers to safeguard the planted fields of the main 2017 crop season. It is also recommended to start as soon as possible with the rehabilitation and upgrade of irrigation schemes. This will minimize losses of water, increasing timely water availability. Increased food imports, commercial and/or through food aid, would be required during the three lean months (July to September) until the harvest of the 2017 main season from the end of September to October, in order to ensure adequate food consumption for the most vulnerable people.

<sup>1</sup> Includes rice, cereals, soybeans and potatoes in cereal equivalent.

<sup>2</sup> Concerns the 2016 main season crops harvested in September and October 2016, and 2016/17 early season crops harvested by June 2017.

