



GIEWS Country Brief

The Syrian Arab Republic

Reference Date: 22-December-2020

FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT

- Favourable weather conditions for development of 2021 crops, but high input costs hinder agricultural activities
- Wheat harvest in 2020 above five-year average but still below pre-crisis levels
- Economic challenges increase food insecurity

Favourable weather conditions, but high input costs hinder agricultural activities

The sowing of the 2021 barley crop started in mid-October and is still underway. Wheat sowing started in November and is about to conclude. The first substantial rainfall of the season, easing concerns over an early season drought, was recorded in November. As of early December, some pockets of dry weather conditions prevailed in the most eastern part of Hassakeh, the governorate with the largest planted area and cereal production in the country.

Agricultural activities have been hampered by the high prices of domestic and imported inputs due to the dramatic currency depreciation and high transportation costs, resulting from fuel shortages. Diesel shortages have adversely affected mechanized operations during the winter season and are likely to continue in the future.

For the planting in 2020, the General Organization for Seed Multiplication (GOSM) provided wheat seed at a subsidized price of SYP 450/kg. Farmers were eligible to purchase 25 kg of seeds for each registered donum (equivalent to 0.1 hectare), which, assuming satisfactory quality, would be an adequate seeding rate. The GOSM current supply capacity is estimated to cover only 20 percent of the total wheat seed demand. On most markets, wheat seeds in October were traded on average for about SYP 560/kg, while in Rural Damascus the price was as high as SYP 800/kg. Barley seeds were sold by GOSM at SYP 200/kg, while on retail markets they were sold for SYP 500/kg, reaching SYP 700/kg in Rural Damascus. Because of the inability of GOSM to fulfil farmers' seed needs in their entirety, most likely farmers used seeds saved from the previous season. The Agriculture Bank provided nitrate fertilizer at the subsidized price of SYP 214/kg (the average market rate in October was SYP 1 000/kg), an increase from SYP 108/kg last year and phosphate at SYP 250/kg (compared to SYP 690/kg on

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Crop Calendar

(*major foodcrop)



Sowing
Growing
Harvesting

Source: FAO/GIEWS.

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Cereal Production

	2015-2019 average	2019	2020 estimate	change 2020/2019
	000 tonnes			percent
Wheat	1 843	2 176	2 800	28.7
Barley	971	2 000	2 254	12.7
Maize	131	121	150	24.0
Others	6	6	6	0.0
Total	2 951	4 303	5 210	21.1

Note: percentage change calculated from unrounded data.

Source: FAO/GIEWS Country Cereal Balance Sheet.

the market), an increase from SYP 175/kg last year. Overall, the quantities provided at subsidized prices were insufficient to cover national needs.

Although the global economic slowdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic has depressed global oil prices, the country is grappling with fuel shortages due to international sanctions and currency depreciation. Although farmers are eligible to buy diesel at SYP 185/litre, they rely on the open market due to general shortages.

In August and September 2020, more than 22 000 hectares of forests and orchards were burnt in Homs, Hama, Latakia and Tartous. About 40 percent of which were agricultural lands.

Above-average 2020 cereal harvest, but still below pre-crisis level

Favourable weather conditions led to an upturn in the 2020 cereal production estimated at 5.2 million tonnes, over 20 percent more than in the previous year and about 77 percent above the five-year average. The 2020 wheat production is estimated at 2.8 million tonnes, up from 2.2 million tonnes in 2019, but still well below the pre-crisis level of 4.1 million tonnes (2002-2011).

The General Establishment for Cereal Processing and Trade (Hoboob) remains the exclusive institution in charge of purchasing locally-produced wheat. The Government allocated SYP 450 billion for purchases of domestic wheat at SYP 400/kg (equivalent to about USD 150/tonne, using the June 2020 parallel exchange rate). Reports from late October 2020 indicate that Hoboob purchased about 690 000 tonnes of wheat to be used in the 2020/21 marketing year for the production of subsidized bread. Before the conflict, the purchasing targets were about 2 million tonnes. Information on the actual amount of cereals in stocks is not available. Details are discussed in GIEWS Update [“Syrian Arab Republic: National cereal balance”](#)

Economic woes increase food insecurity

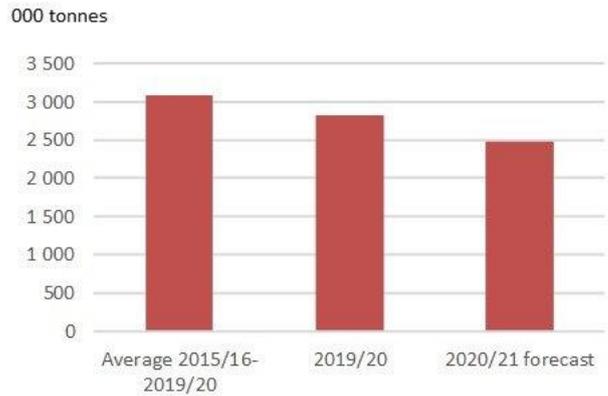
The entire economy, already battered by nine years of conflict, suffers spill-over effects from the financial crisis in Lebanon which before acted as a financial intermediary. The Economist Intelligence Unit estimates the price inflation in 2020 at almost 100 percent. In June 2020, the official fixed exchange rate was raised from SYP 704/US dollar to SYP 1 256/US dollar to entice the use of official channels. On the parallel market, in September 2019, USD 1 was traded for SYP 600, while in mid-December 2020 it was sold for SYP 2 700. The rapid devaluation brought industrial production to a stand-still, as industrialists were unable to purchase inputs, with a consequent increase in unemployment rates.

There is a severe shortage of essentials, including bread at subsidized prices, medicines and fuel. Subsidized bread is rationed through a smart card system. In late October 2020, the Ministry of Internal Trade and Consumer Protection doubled the price of a subsidized pack of bread to SYP 100, while reduced the weight of each pack from about 2.8 to 2.4 pounds and imposed limits on how many packs can be purchased by each family. Overall, subsidized bread remains four times less expensive than the free market.

Subsidized fuel for general use, available through smart fuel cards, should sell for SYP 250/litre of “type 90” and SYP 575/litre

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Cereals Imports



Note: Includes rice in milled terms. Split year refers to individual crop marketing years (for rice, calendar year of second year shown).

Source: FAO/GIEWS Country Cereal Balance Sheets.

of “type 95.” On the open market the average fuel price in October was SYP 700/litre, well below the SYP 1 000/litre registered the month before.

As of 2020, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that 9.3 million people are food insecure with a further 2.2 million people at risk of food insecurity, an increase from 7.9 million and 1.9 million, respectively in 2019. As of October 2020, about 6.7 million Syrians were internally displaced and 5.6 million were registered as refugees outside of the country. In addition, a large number of Syrians live abroad without refugee registration.

The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the already challenging situation that the country has been facing amidst high unemployment rates, rapid currency devaluation and the absence of an adequate social safety net system. Many casual labourers rely on their daily wages, which have decreased significantly.

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