

AFGHANISTAN Food Security Alert

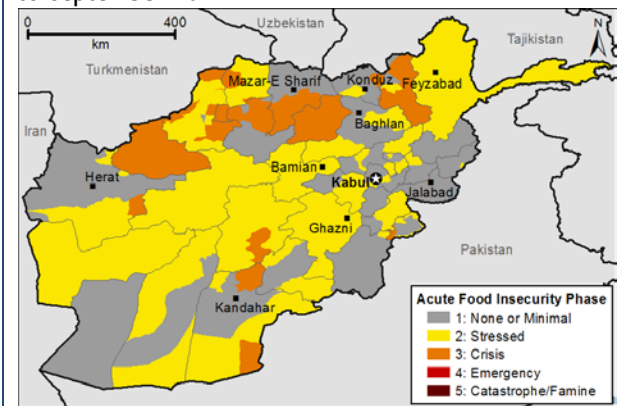
June 20, 2011

Poor rainfed wheat harvest in northern Afghanistan raises need for assistance

Satellite derived rainfall estimates indicate that most of Afghanistan had an untimely and inadequate rain and snow season this year. As a result, there will be heavy losses in rainfed wheat crops, underperforming irrigated wheat crops, poor pasture conditions, and low income earning opportunities in northern Afghanistan and the central highlands this year. Ultimately, households in northern Afghanistan who are dependent on rainfed crops as a primary food source or on-farm agricultural labor as a major income source will be unable to afford essential non-food expenditures during Fall 2011 that are needed to protect livelihoods (e.g., input purchases). Without additional assistance these households will likely face food deficits beginning in the fall and intensifying until the start of the 2012 harvest in May.

Normalized differential vegetation index (NDVI) from April 23 to May 08 2011 indicates that plant “vigor” is significantly less than the short-term mean (2000-2009) in wheat growing areas of northern Afghanistan. This period coincides with the typical peak greenness of spring and winter wheat crops in northern Afghanistan, allowing for the most useful comparisons with NDVI from past years. The MAIL and FAO Agricultural Prospect Report estimates that this year’s production will be approximately 3.256 million metric tons of wheat, 28 percent less than 2010, an average year.

Figure 1. Most-likely food security scenario, July to September 2011



Source: FEWS NET

In a year with a normal harvest, most households in the northern rainfed and irrigated wheat growing areas can produce enough wheat to sell in the market while still meeting their food needs throughout the year. However, due to the shortfalls in production this year, the reliance on purchases will increase and income from wheat sales and on-farm labor will decrease.

In anticipation of reduced supply and increased demand for wheat, wheat prices in northern Afghanistan increased sharply during the harvest from an already high level. In March, wheat grain prices in Mazar-E Sharief were 30 percent higher than the same period last year, and in May prices for wheat grain were 85 percent higher than the same period last year. The poor harvests will increase the importance and influence of wheat imports from Kazakhstan, where prices are also high (141 percent higher than the same month last year). While it is too early in the season to accurately forecast this year’s harvest in Kazakhstan, current growing conditions are good, and an average August/September harvests could prevent prices in Afghanistan from increasing further. Assuming that there are no major changes to regional trade policies, wheat availability in the markets is expected to be sufficient, but prices could be prohibitively high.

The poor wheat harvest will also limit the supply of on-farm labor opportunities in the north, an important income source for poor households. Subsequently, an oversupply of workers will likely drive unskilled labor wages down this year and limit poor households’ ability to cope with higher prices. The combination of a poor wheat harvest, higher retail wheat prices, and reduced incomes will leave poor households who are dependent on rainfed agriculture and on-farm labor Stressed (IPC Phase 2) during the summer and in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in the fall (Figure 1) with a strong likelihood that the severity of food insecurity will continue to grow until the next harvest (May 2012).

Livelihoods support needs in the fall and food assistance in the fall and winter will be above normal in northern Afghanistan, particularly in areas where rainfed agriculture is most prominent, as well as in the central highlands. Any response planning for intervention in the fall and winter should prepare for diminished access after December with the onset of snow. FEWS NET will continue to monitor regional wheat production and market fluctuations and update food security projections.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.