

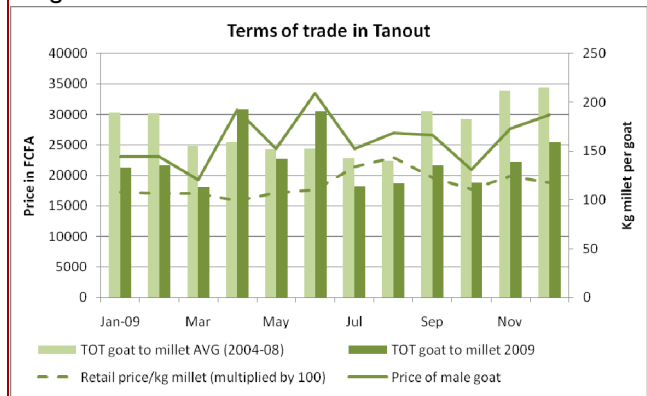
## NIGER Food Security Alert

January 28, 2010

### Forage deficits raise the risk of above-normal animal mortality

Food security in Niger is expected to be poor in the next six months, following a late start and early cessation of 2009 rains. In pastoral areas, forage production is 66 percent below national needs; this year's deficit is twice as severe as last year's. In Zinder and Diffa, wide swaths of rangelands were bare in December, when they are normally good, in spite of the early departure of transhumant pastoralists. As a result, many pastoralists are concentrated with their herds in pastures to the north. Local livestock specialists are concerned that overgrazing will destroy these pastures as early as February/March, forcing pastoralists to migrate across 150-200 km of bare pastureland to reach southern pastures in agricultural zones of southern Niger and northern Nigeria. Pastoralists in the northeast will need assistance to avoid high animal mortality.

**Figure 1. Male goat-to-millet terms of trade in Tanout, Niger**



Source: FEWS NET

Major pasture deficits were recorded in Abalak and Tchintabaraden in northern Tahoua region, Dakoro and Mayahi in Maradi, and Filingué in Tillabéri region. However, northern Tanout and Gouré in Zinder region, northern Dakoro in Maradi region, and the entire agropastoral and pastoral areas of Diffa region are most affected. Pastoralists may move south or north in search of pasture as resources near their homesteads deteriorate. Though southern pastures are better in quality than those in the north and offer better access to markets, many pastoralists prefer the northern pastures because there is less risk of theft or harassment there. This year, pastures in areas of origin – particularly in NGuel Kolo, NGuel Bely, and Kourfoye in Mainé Soroa and Kabelewa in NGuigmi – were so poor that animals needed to move in November/December. Because southern pastures are not “freed” from agricultural use (off-season and flood-recession agriculture) until February-April and because the development of northern pastures was near normal, many pastoralists risked moving northward. Unlike in a normal year, pastures in the areas of origin were too poor to support milking stock at the homestead, and many pastoral households migrated with the entire family and the milking animals, rather than just sending men with non-breeding stock. The high concentration of animals is degrading pastures much faster than expected. Without assistance, most of the livestock will not survive the trek to the southern pastures and livestock markets, putting pastoralists at risk of destitution and high to extreme food insecurity.

Sedentary pastoralists remaining in the deficit areas are responding to the forage deficits by intensifying destocking. Livestock supply in December was about 20 percent above last year's levels nationally, but the supply of small ruminants was twice last year's levels in Tanout (Zinder) and neighboring Dakoro (Maradi), and five times last year's levels in Nguigmi (Diffa). This volume of supply is normally observed only during the June-August agropastoral season. Demand for local and religious holidays in December bolstered purchasing power above the emergency threshold identified by Niger's Early Warning System (50 kg/ male goat). However, in Dakoro and Tanout, livestock-to-millet terms of trade are not only below last year's high levels, but also significantly below average (Figure 1). Earnings from December sales are not expected to be sufficient to meet household food needs for the remainder of 2010. As demand for animals and animal body conditions fall, as is normal between January and June, livestock-to-cereal terms of trade will fall. Households are likely to accelerate destocking beyond critical levels, making them highly to extremely food insecure.

Pastoralists in northern pastures will need help accessing dry season pastures in southern agricultural zones in March by transporting animals and households or by stocking animal feed, water, and nutritional assistance along transhumance corridors. Livelihoods support, particularly in managing destocking, will be needed as of March. If the May/June rains are delayed, most pastoralists will need additional assistance to avoid destitution and increased rates of malnutrition and mortality.

*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.*