

CENTRAL AMERICA Food Security Alert

November 3, 2011

Impacts of Tropical Depression 12-E threaten food security across the region

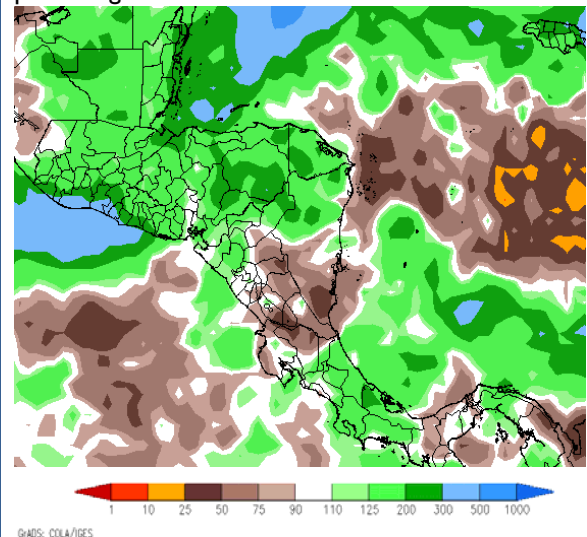
Tropical Depression 12-E and a subsequent low pressure system produced more than 1,000 mm of rain in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua between October 10 and 19. Rainfall levels for the first two weeks of October were already more than 125 percent above expected rainfall totals for that month (Figure 1). Coastal areas of these countries were the most affected by flooding and overflowing rivers, causing extensive damage to crops and basic infrastructure, and displacing more than 100,000 people. The impact on *postrera* crops, which were at the growing stage, is of most concern. Damage to sugar cane, coffee, and cardamom crops to varying degrees in the affected countries also raise concerns for the impact on unskilled labor opportunities, important sources of income for poor households in the coming months. An early start to the annual lean season is expected by one to two months, beginning around February/March.

The most affected areas of Guatemala include the southern coast, the western highlands, Guatemala department, and southern Petén. Based on Ministry of Agriculture data as of October 17, the storm affected 13,008 *manzanas* of cropland, particularly maize, both the highlands crops and the *postrera* crops in the rest of the country, followed by sesame and bean crops. In the highlands, a unimodal area, poor harvests could mean an early start to the lean season in approximately February/March, continuing until the next harvest in November 2012. In affected bimodal areas of the country, below-average harvests are also expected in some areas, with stocks expected to run out about one month early. Fungal diseases due to excess moisture from the rains could also heighten crop losses for the *postrera* season, as well as reduce the amount of seeds available for sowing 2012 *primera* crops. An additional concern is the damage to roads and other transport infrastructure, which could hinder the provision of assistance, reduce access to markets, and raise prices for transport of commodities to these areas.

In El Salvador, 69 percent of all municipalities were affected, with damage to an estimated 50 percent of bean crops and 34 percent of corn. Damage will most impact subsistence farmers and labor-dependent households, as 7 to 20 percent of coffee crops and 20 percent of sugar cane crops have been affected, which provide important seasonal labor opportunities. Assessments are needed to determine the extent of crop damages to the *primera* harvests, and whether households will have sufficient reserves until the next harvest in 2012. In Honduras, the north and south areas were most affected. Most households in the south plant no more than one *manzana* of land on leased farms. Although these households had a good *primera* harvest, they also rely on *postrera* crops, which were affected by the heavy rains. The lean season will set in earlier than usual if households do not have sufficient reserves for the next few months and are unable to replant *postrera* crops. In Nicaragua, crops in the southeast and in Estelí department were most affected. *Postrera* bean crops are among Nicaragua's most important crops. However, the country also has a third (*apante*) and very important growing season, which has not yet gotten underway.

Seed availability and supplies are essential for replanting crops and for a good 2012 *primera* season. MFEWS will continue to monitor rainfall forecasts, market supplies and behavior, potential outbreaks of disease, and nutrition conditions.

Figure 1. Rainfall for October 1 – 19, 2011 as a percentage of normal



Source: NOAA/MFEWS

Effects by country			
Country	People affected	People evacuated	Deaths
Guatemala	248,924	29,207	38
El Salvador	150,000	55,546	34
Honduras	57,843	11,402	13
Nicaragua	134,000	6,920	8

Source: Government data as of 10/17 and 10/19