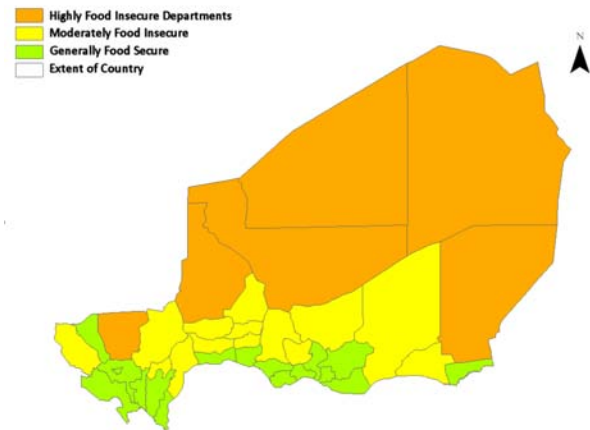


NIGER Food Security Update

February 2008

- The final 2007/08 crop assessment figures indicate a grain surplus of 215,881 MT. While much more than the surplus posted for 2004/05 (21,809 MT), when Niger faced its last food security crisis, 2007/08 production trails last year's figures, though it is above the five-year average. Even with the overall increase in production compared with the average, per capita food availability this year is only 258 kg, compared with 303 kg last year, and an average of 284 kg.
- Despite current grain availability, market disruptions are beginning to reduce supplies, and prices are increasing as surplus-producing farmers chose to hold their reserves, fearing a similar situation to that of 2005, and traders stockpile crops in anticipation of food access problems and further price increases in the next few months. As a result, households posting grain production shortfalls are starting to experience food insecurity, particularly in the northern part of the country, where civil insecurity has disrupted trade flows and limited market gardening opportunities.

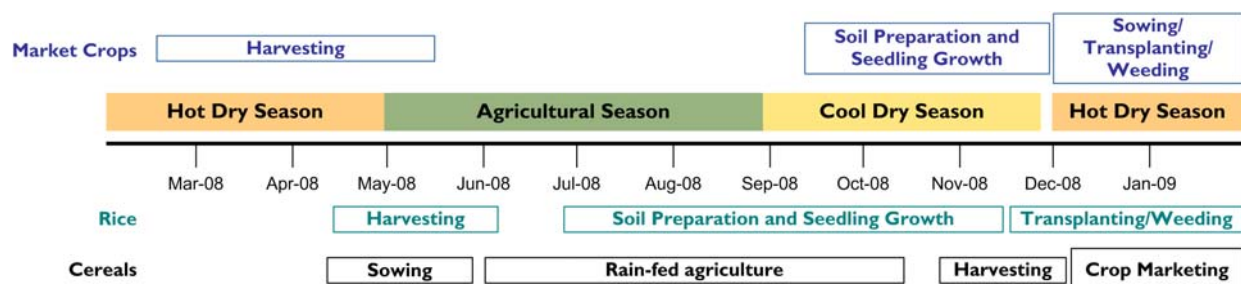
Figure 1. Current estimated food security conditions, first quarter of 2008 (January through March)



Source: FEWS NET Niger

- Child nutrition is deteriorating in the wake of recent outbreaks of seasonal childhood diseases such as meningitis and respiratory infections that result from high temperatures and sand and dust storms. Depletion of household food reserves, shortages of off-season crops, and rising food prices on local markets are also contributing to deteriorating nutritional conditions.
- Pastoral conditions are marked by above-average water and pasture availability.
- Mounting food insecurity in certain areas, particularly in the far eastern and northwestern parts of the country, are leading to a depletion of food reserves and a heavy reliance on local markets (where prices are high) for poor households in agropastoral areas. This has caused a mass out-migration of able-bodied workers to urban and major irrigated crop-producing areas in search of jobs.

Seasonal calendar and timeline of major events



Source: FEWS NET

Current food situation

Steadily-rising grain prices in markets around the country reflect strong demand from consumers and traders in the face of diminishing supplies on local markets. In addition, increasing prices for imported grains, particularly maize and rice, are driving up prices for millet, the main grain product consumed in Niger.

A large share of moderately-to-extremely food insecure households is concentrated in agricultural and agropastoral areas of Ouallam, Filingué, Doutchi, Loga, Tahoua, Keita, Gouré, Tchintabaraden, Abalak, and NGuigmi, where poor agricultural conditions during the 2007/08 season caused production shortfalls and below-normal pasture conditions.

Food security of households in areas affected by civil insecurity in the north is equally serious, and residents of rural areas of Arlit, Tchirozérine, and Bilma departments currently face a deterioration in their purchasing power and a shortage of market supplies.

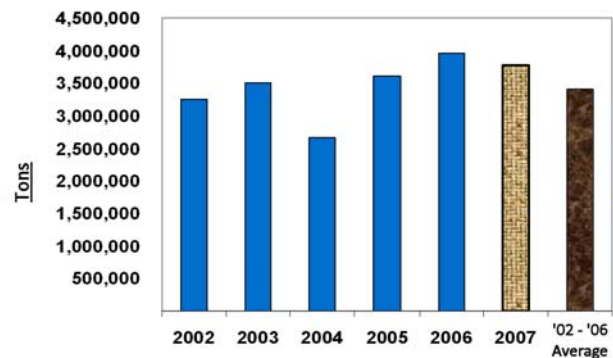
However, food security conditions are reportedly satisfactory in the agricultural, pastoral, and agropastoral areas of Diffa, Tanout, Say and Tillabery departments, thanks to average or above-average crop and pasture production, good harvests of irrigated rice crops, and good off-season and vegetable crop yields.

Assessment of food availability

The Bureau of Agricultural Statistics’ final harvest assessment for the 2007/08 growing season indicated a production level of 3,778,312 MT for local grain crops (millet, sorghum, corn, and fonio). This production figure trails last year’s production by 5 percent and is 11 percent above the five-year average production figure. Total gross grain production is estimated at 3,856,812 MT – 3,778,312 MT for coarse grains (millet, sorghum, corn, and fonio), 8,500 MT for wheat, and 70,000 MT of paddy rice. This puts grain availability at 3,569,082 MT, compared to an estimated need of 3,353,201 MT for human consumption, Availability per capita this year is therefore estimated to be 258 kg, compared with the consumption standard of 231 kg per capita per year. However, these resources are extremely unevenly distributed among different parts of the country.

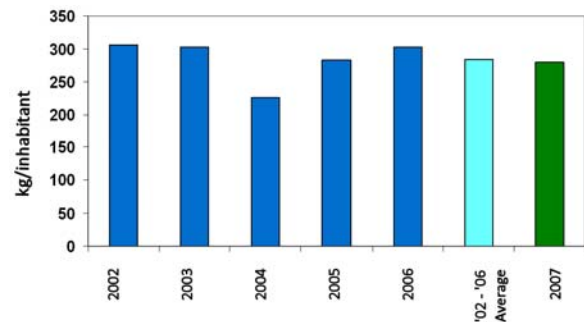
Grain production deficits are reported in Tillabery, Filingué, Ouallam, and Say departments (in the Tillabery region); Doutchi and Loga departments (in the Dosso region); Tchintabaren, Abalak, Tahoua, and Birni Konni departments (in the Tahoua region); Mainé Soroa department (in the Diffa region); and in the Agadez region, owing to the combined effects of planting delays, a shorter than usual rainy season, flooding, and civil insecurity. These production shortfalls are undermining household food security in these areas. The shortfalls are also exacerbated by grain market disruptions, which are causing sharp price increases and lower market supplies compared with average figures for the far eastern and northwestern parts of the country.

Figure 2. Comparison of trends in grain production



Source: Bureau of Agricultural Statistics; Graphic by FEWS NET

Figure 3. Comparison of trends in per capita grain production



Source: Bureau of Agricultural Statistics; Graphic by FEWS NET

Nutritional Conditions

The number of cases of malnutrition among children under five is still on the rise, jumping from 3,575 in the first two weeks of January to 3,618 by the beginning of February. The departments of Arlit, Tchirozérine, Diffa, Filingué, Téra, and Keita report the steepest increases in malnutrition rates, though agropastoral areas of Ouallam, Loga, and Mayahi, as well as pastoral areas of Tchintabaraden, NGuigmi, Dakoro, Gouré, and Abalak also report increasing caseloads of malnourished children.

The main causes of child malnutrition in those areas reporting sharp increases in malnutrition rates are related to: 1) the depletion of household food reserves and households' increasing reliance on markets in a climate of steep price increases, 2) poor sanitary and hygiene condition, and 3) improper breastfeeding practices, premature weaning, and food taboos.

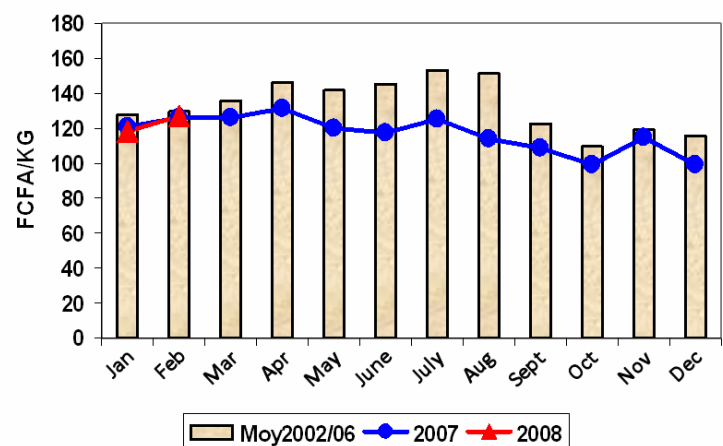
Markets, trade and food access

Prices for market crops have increased steadily on many markets since January, due to fewer shipments of grain from producers and an increasingly strong domestic and foreign demand. Increasing prices for grains in general and corn and rice in particular in Niger and in neighboring countries pose a significant threat to household food security. These price trends are especially harmful to consumers affected by grain and pasture deficits due to a poor 2007/08 rainy season. However, in major crop-producing areas such as Maradi, good 2007/08 harvests are keeping current grain prices on par with 2007 prices and the five-year average for the same time in most markets in these areas (Figure 4).

By contrast, market and price conditions for grain deficit areas are less favorable to consumers compared with conditions at the same time last year, except at certain local markets such as Tchirozérine, where prices are falling due to government interventions in the face of the instability in this area (Figure 5). These generally unfavorable market conditions in grain deficit areas are exacerbated by increased domestic and foreign demand as traders and grain banks replenish their inventories and grain-deficit households try build up their own supplies.

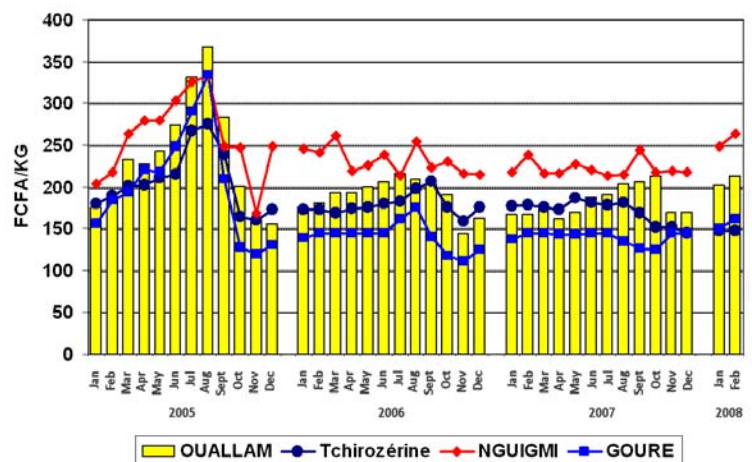
The situation in NGuigmi, which faces the impacts of production deficits and reduced trader access due to civil insecurity, is especially alarming. Violence in the northern part of the country is adversely affecting market supplies, and these structurally production deficit areas have limited access to the normal trade flows of cereals and livestock between southern to northern Niger. Civil insecurity is also impeding income-generating activities, steadily eroding the purchasing power of households in these areas.

Figure 4. Millet prices at the Maradi border market (a surplus area) between January 2003 and February 2008, compared with the 2003/07 average



Source: SIMA and FEWS NET

Figure 5. Millet prices at markets in grain-short areas of Ouallam, Tchirozérine, NGuigmi and Gouré prices in 2005, 2006 and 2007



Source: SIMA and FEWS NET

Herders are still getting good prices for their animals, thanks to favorable grazing conditions in many pastoral areas and generally healthy livestock body conditions.

Recommended measures

The main causes of food access problems for many households in Niger are production shortfalls in several areas of the country and poverty. Rising grain prices are also sharply eroding food access and nutritional conditions, particularly for poor households. Civil insecurity in the north is also making it harder to get supplies to markets in that part of the country.

With this in mind, relief and capacity-building programs designed to help households cope with current domestic shocks will need to be extended. Targeted interventions for high-risk population groups, such as cash for work, food for work, grain banks, subsidized grain sales, and microfinance programs should be quickly implemented in the most affected areas. Particular attention should be given to food security in Agadez and Diffa, northern Tillabery and Gouré department in Zinder region, due to rising prices and the resultant increased risks to livelihoods in these areas.

Selected price data: Current nominal grain prices on domestic markets in 2007/08, compared with 2004/05 and the average for the last five years

Source: FEWS NET

