

NIGER Food Security Alert

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Production deficits will drive increased food insecurity in Niger in 2010

After a late start and early dry spells, Niger's 2009 rainfed cropping season ended early. Millet, the country's main staple, was generally planted late, and given the early cessation of rains, it failed to mature properly, resulting in widespread yield declines. Pasture conditions have also been poor for the second year in a row. Assuming that food markets function well, food insecurity is likely to remain moderate through December. However, next year's hunger season is expected to begin as early as April, rather than in June as it would in a normal year, and half of the agropastoral and pastoral populations will be moderately to highly food insecure through August 2010, particularly in the north-west, the east, and the central pastoral zone. Above normal external assistance will be required.

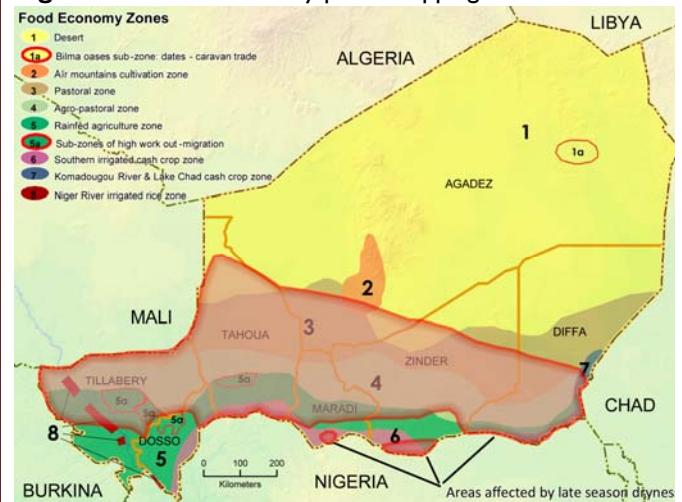
The Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) jointly conducted by CILSS, FEWS NET, FAO, WFP, and the Government of Niger estimates below-average millet and sorghum yields in all but four of the country's 36 departments, including 50-60 percent yield declines in the agropastoral zones and 10-30 percent yield declines in the normally surplus-producing agricultural zones of Maradi, Tahoua, and Zinder. Overall, yield-per-hectare is expected to be 24 percent below average. Crop conditions this year closely resemble those of 1997/98, when final production was 22 percent below estimated national needs. However, deficits will be larger this year because planted area is low due to re-sowing and the late start of season and because the population of Niger has grown substantially over the past decade. This analysis differs from the Ministry of Agriculture's 2009 rain-fed production estimate. The MoA estimate assumed that headed plants surveyed in early September, when rainfall was good, reached maturity when in fact, the early cessation of rains has meant that crops in many of these areas have performed poorly.

Due to last year's pasture deficits, livestock births were below normal this year, leading to reduced dairy production. Milk prices are stable and normal for this time of year, implying that less milk is available for pastoral household consumption and/or pastoral household revenue has been reduced. Fortunately, many transhumant pastoralists remained south of their normal northern pastures this year, and many have already migrated to northern Nigeria, Benin, and Cameroon (three months early), thus preventing competition for resources with sedentary pastoralists in northern areas. In spite of poor animal body conditions, prices of small ruminants, as well as terms of trade, continue to improve relative to the April-June dry season, and will likely remain stable or continue to rise through the end of December given high demand for meat related to Tabaski in November and other holidays in December.

Even with reduced food production, food availability is expected to be sufficient through December 2009, and access will be facilitated by high demand for migrant labor in cities and border towns, strong incentives for off-season market gardening, favorable exchange rates for importing cereals from neighboring Nigeria, the arrival of irrigated rice harvests from the Niger River in November/December, and targeted interventions by the government and partners. Provided that a favorable economic climate persists, food insecurity will be moderate through December. Thereafter, declining food stocks, rising cereal prices, and falling livestock prices will reduce household purchasing power, causing moderate to high food insecurity, especially among agropastoral and pastoral households, through August 2010. Food assistance needs are expected to be large, and to begin earlier than normal, yet government procurement plans are insufficient, and the WFP pipeline is limited. To address likely food deficits in 2010, affected areas need immediate assistance to encourage off-season production (i.e., agricultural inputs) as well as resources to rebuild community cereal and animal feed banks.

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.

Figure 1. Areas affected by poor cropping season



Source: FEWS NET