

Households in Crisis in the Guatemalan highlands and southwestern Honduras beginning in March

Contrary to initial forecasts, *Postrera* crops have developed normally in most areas of Central America. Along with the assistance provided by international organizations and national governments, this has improved the food security outlook in the region. However, it is projected that, in limited areas of Guatemala's temperate highlands and southwestern Honduras, some very poor households will be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) due to a poor *Primera* season in 2014 and the impact of coffee rust since 2012. While less affected, the poorest households in the eastern region of Guatemala, the southern and western regions of Honduras, the northwestern region of Nicaragua, and the coffee-producing region of El Salvador will continue to be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) until the harvest of *Primera* crops in September 2015.

A prolonged *canícula* (seasonal dry spell) this year, primarily in July, caused damage to crops in the region, including a decrease in the production of basic grains.

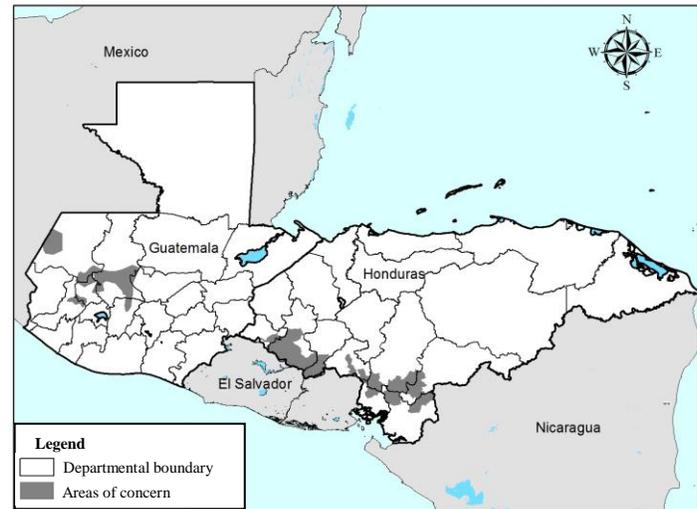
Production was as much as 75 percent below normal for many subsistence farmers in the temperate highlands of Guatemala and the southwestern region of Honduras during the principal maize-growing season. Although *Postrera* crop development has been normal in the Central America region, this planting season does not occur in the temperate highlands of Guatemala, and communities surveyed in areas of southwestern Honduras during the World Food Program's Emergency Food Security Assessment report that only 65 percent of producers were able to plant, as a result of the prolonged *canícula* and the lack of appropriate seed. Estimates indicate that very poor households in these areas of Guatemala and Honduras will have depleted their reserves by January at the latest – as much as two months earlier than normal – making them dependent on purchased food for a prolonged period in 2015.

The typical increase in demand for temporary labor for the harvesting of commercial crops (primarily coffee) between November and March will improve incomes. However, despite the improved production projections for the current harvest as compared to the previous year, coffee production levels will not reach those generated during the 2011/2012 harvest, prior to the coffee rust outbreak. As a result, it is projected that the income of day laborers in the coffee sector, although greater than last year, will continue to be below-average.

Furthermore, many small, non-associated coffee producers have not received technical assistance for controlling coffee rust, nor financing that would enable them to invest in improved management and re-planting on their farms. These producers continue to suffer from both low yields and poor quality. For some of these small producers in the Guatemalan highlands, this has signified losses up to 80 percent below production levels recorded in 2011/2012. This situation, when combined with previously incurred debts and losses to basic grain harvests, makes this the population group most affected by food insecurity.

As a result of the shocks to both food sources and income, it is projected that, in the absence of assistance, very poor households in the most affected areas of the Guatemalan temperate highlands and the southwestern region of Honduras will face a gap between their food needs and their purchasing power beginning in March and extending until the next harvest of basic grains, which begins in August in southwestern Honduras and November in the Guatemalan highlands. Atypical migration, including migration to urban areas in search of employment in domestic and construction work, and an

Figure 1. Areas of concern in the Guatemalan highlands and southwestern Honduras



Source: FEWS NET

increase in the sale of firewood represent atypical strategies that these households may rely on. Humanitarian assistance will be necessary to protect the livelihoods of these households and ensure adequate food access.