

The Mesoamerican Food Security Early Warning System (MFEWS) issues periodic warnings when a food crisis is developing, where groups are now, or about to become, highly food insecure and take increasingly irreversible actions that undermine their future food security. Decision makers should urgently address the situations highlighted by this Warning.

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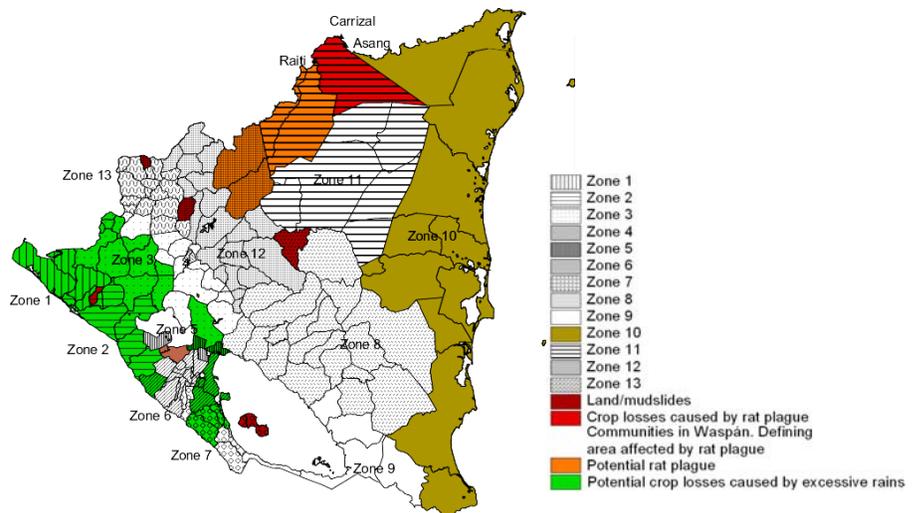
Rat Plague and Excessive Rainfall Causing Crop Losses in Nicaragua

Nicaragua currently faces a food security crisis in Waspán, where a rat plague has caused heavy localized crop damage. Though so far the plague has been limited to Waspán, it may also spread into Jinotega. The country is also suffering from excessive rains, resulting in mudslides and minor crop losses which are unlikely to have a major food security impact.

SITUATION IN WASPÁN

The Government of Nicaragua has declared a State of Emergency for the municipality of Waspán, located in northeastern Nicaragua in the Autonomous Region of the North Atlantic (RAAN). Rats have caused crop losses of rice and yucca, two of the most important staples in the zone, leaving households in the western part of Waspán acutely food insecure. According to a late August 2005 interagency assessment (joint United Nations and GON), 18 communities in western Waspán are in need of assistance. The 14 most affected communities have lost almost 100 percent of their rice crop and a significant portion of their yucca crop. These communities will require food aid until at least the next harvest which occurs in November and December. Preliminary reports indicate that communities in neighboring San Jose Bocay and Wiwilí have also experienced crop losses.

Affected Areas and Livelihood Zones in Nicaragua



Waspán suffers from high chronic malnutrition, pervasive chronic poverty and food insecurity, isolation and inaccessibility, with access to the western part of the municipality possible only by river transport. The 2005 MFEWS/Action Against Hunger Nicaragua Livelihoods Profiles^[1] determined that eastern Waspán lies in the Coastal Autonomous Regions Livelihood Zone (Zone 10), and western Waspán lies in the Northern Atlantic Agricultural Frontier and Mining Zone (Zone 11). Poor households, who constitute roughly three quarters of the population of each zone, obtain a relatively minor proportion of their annual food intake from their own crop production (estimated at about 30% in Zone 11, for example). Poor households in Zone 11 access on average an estimated 60% of their annual food intake through market purchase, with cash earned principally through manual labor. The area most affected in Waspán tends to exhibit higher levels of crop production as well as higher access to fishing and hunting. This season's crop losses are expected to affect poor households between October 2005 and August 2006 in two ways: an immediate food gap that households will need to find a way to fill (e.g., through fishing, hunting and barter); loss of rice for selling or bartering. Monitoring market prices of staple foods will provide an indication of the capacity of poor households to fill this food gap through the market.

The Ministry of Agriculture (MAGFOR), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Development Programme, are responding in the 14 worst affected communities with emergency food aid for 4,450 people for a period

^[1] Nicaragua Livelihood Profiles, Mesoamerican Food Security Early Warning System and Action Against Hunger, 2005. Neighboring Jinotega lies in Zone 11 to the east, and in Zone 12 (Coffee with Agriculture and Livestock Livelihood Zone).

of three months. MAGFOR and WFP will provide assistance in all 18 communities with agricultural rehabilitation programs for the current sowing season (*postrera*—*September/October*) including seeds, pest control and training in rat control measures. It is expected that these interventions will curb the impact on food security of the current crop loss, if the next harvest is good. These interventions may have to expand to include more communities than the ones affected by the current crop losses. However, longer-term solutions for this area of Nicaragua are still required and the abovementioned organizations, together with the European Commission, are planning a longer-term strategy for agricultural rehabilitation in the zone.

EXCESSIVE RAINS IN THE PACIFIC AND NORTHERN REGIONS

Heavy rains since mid-September have saturated soils in the Pacific and northern regions of Nicaragua causing floods and landslides. As of October 10, according to the National System for Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Response (SINAPRED), 386 houses have been flooded, 13 houses have been destroyed and 88 semi-destroyed, 973 people have been evacuated, and three people have died. Affected areas include the departments of Chinandega, Leon, Managua, Granada, Nueva Segovia, Matagalpa and Jinotega. There are warnings of landslides in various municipalities including Dipilto, Rio Blanco (Cerro Musún), Posoltega (Volcano Casitas), San Sebastian de Yalí, Moyogalpa and Altagracia (Ometepe), see map. The municipal emergency committee has declared a state of emergency in the municipality of San Sebastian de Yalí. The impact on agricultural production is estimated to be a five to ten percent loss of the *postrera* harvest, which would not lead to a food security crisis. A full assessment of damages and potential food security impacts is still required. SINAPRED is providing assistance to the 973 people in temporary shelters and has not requested additional aid. The situation should be closely monitored.

TIMELINE OF CRITICAL EVENTS

