

Food security Crisis likely due to coffee rust and drought

As a result of projected poor harvests in 2014, the reduction in coffee-sector income for day laborers, and a more rapid than usual increase in the prices of some staple foods, extremely poor households across large areas of Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador will experience a rapid deterioration in their food security in early 2015. Atypically high levels of humanitarian assistance, possibly the highest since Hurricane Mitch in 1998, will likely be required in order to avoid a food crisis.

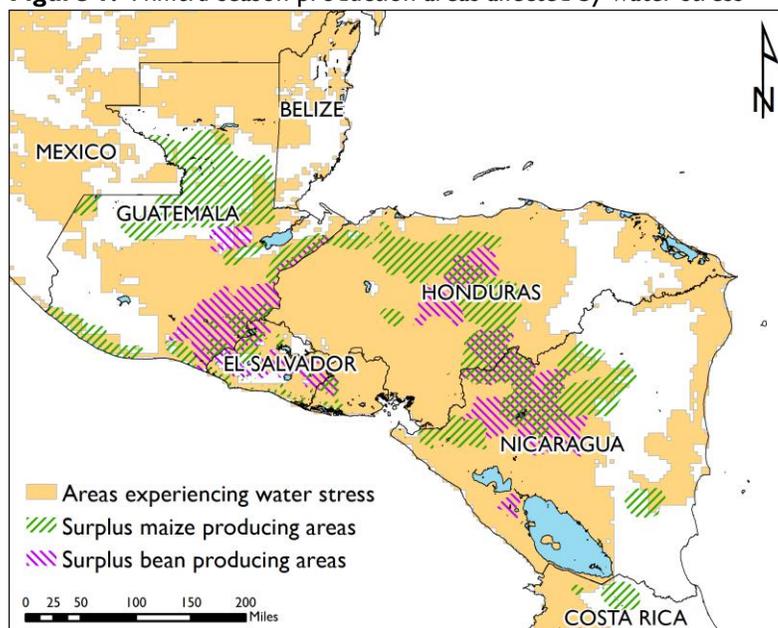
The lean season in this region typically ends in September with the *Primera* harvest. This year, however, departments located in the region's dry corridor, along with some surplus-production areas in all four countries, have received poor rainfall. The worst-affected areas are in eastern and western Guatemala and El Salvador, southwestern and southeastern Honduras, and northern and central Nicaragua (Figure 1).

In Nicaragua and Honduras, rainfall deficits began in May, preventing some subsistence farmers from planting. In the eastern areas of El Salvador and Guatemala, rainfall deficits began in late June. Throughout the region the *canícula* (a typical mid-season dry spell) has extended beyond the usual 15 days, negatively impacting crops. Since late June, rainfall accumulation in the affected areas are 50 to 75 percent below average. With the exception of Guatemala, this dryness is the worst in ten years, including the El Niño year of 2009. Losses of *Primera* crops are estimated at between 9 and 75 percent (Figure 2), while losses incurred by subsistence farmers located in the worst-affected areas are expected to exceed 70 percent. Forecasts by the XLIV Central American Climate Outlook Forum indicate below-average rainfall will continue through November in all four countries, meaning that *Postrera* harvests are also likely to be below-average.

Income is also expected to be below-average over the coming year. For the third consecutive year, demand for coffee labor and wages received by coffee day laborers are expected to be lower than normal, due to the persistent effects of coffee rust. Other livelihoods in the region, including fishing and livestock breeding, have also been negatively affected by the recent drought and the transition toward an El Niño.

FEWS NET issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The content of this report does not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

Figure 1. Primera season production areas affected by water stress*



Source: FEWS NET

*Water stress: Insufficient soil moisture for crop development

Figure 2. Estimated losses to basic grains for the 2014 harvests of Primera crops

Country	Commodity	Contribution of Primera season to annual prod. (%)	Loss, in quintals (46kg/quintal)	Expected Primera 2014 production vs 2013†
El Salvador	White maize	85	2,600,000	-14.0
	Red beans	15	86,107	-20.0
Honduras	White maize	80	1,666,675	-17.0
	Red beans	30	180,159	-44.0
Nicaragua	White maize	60	5,879,926	-75.0
	Red beans	30	1,056,328	-75.0
Guatemala	White maize	60	1,890,559	-9.0
	Black beans	40	661,695	-66.2

Source: Prepared by FEWS NET with data provided by national Ministries of Agriculture, and estimates

† For Honduras, the reference year is 2010/11

Compounding this situation are above-average and increasing prices of regionally-produced staple foods (maize and beans) in some areas. The countries most affected in this regard are Nicaragua and Honduras, where red bean prices rose by up to 129 percent between January and June 2014. Prices are expected to continue to trend upward through the end of the first harvest, in September, then level off for a brief period, and then increase again until December, primarily as a result of current crop losses and the potential losses to *Postrera* crops projected for late 2014.

As a result of two consecutive years of losses to staple food harvests due to rainfall irregularities, plus lower levels of coffee labor income, the poorest households in the eastern and western areas of Guatemala are currently classified as Stressed (IPC Phase 2) or in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). In the southern and western portions of Honduras and the western area of El Salvador, households are Stressed (IPC Phase 2). Food insecurity in Nicaragua is currently Minimal (IPC Phase 1).

Between September and December, food security will be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in most of the region's affected areas, despite *Primera* harvests. Some areas of western Guatemala that do not harvest during the *Primera* season will remain in Phase 3. These levels of acute food insecurity, atypical for the post-harvest period, are driven by 1) the magnitude of crop losses, which will prevent subsistence households from replenishing their food reserves, 2) prices of regionally produced staple foods, which are already above-average in some places, and are expected to increase further, and 3) income obtained from wage labor will not be sufficient to compensate for food shortages. This situation is particularly critical in northern Nicaragua, where the drought has had the greatest impact. These factors will force households in the areas of concern to implement atypical response strategies including atypical migration and sale of household assets.

Some stabilization is expected between December and February with *Postrera* harvests across the region and harvests in the western highlands of Guatemala. However, these harvests are also likely to be below average and food security is expected to deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in many parts of the region by March, particularly in the eastern and western areas of Guatemala and El Salvador, the southwestern and southeastern areas of Honduras, and the central and northern areas of Nicaragua.

The severity of expected food insecurity, the early onset of needs, and the size of the affected population are expected to be atypical for the region. Depending on the performance of rainfall and markets over the coming months, the number of people in need of assistance could be the largest since Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Governments and their partners should begin response planning immediately to protect livelihoods and household consumption over the coming year.