

Early start to the lean season expected in localized areas affected by Tropical Depression 12-E

Key messages

- The *postrera* season for maize and beans is generally expected to be normal throughout the region, leading to improvements in food availability in the coming months. However, damages from Tropical Depression 12-E in October 2011 have caused localized crop deficits, mostly for *postrera* season subsistence crops, in parts of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Production at national levels is not significantly affected by the damages, with the exception of El Salvador, where approximately 50 percent of *postrera* production was lost, according to the Government of El Salvador.
- Food security in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua is expected to be largely at Stressed (IPC Phase 2) levels, at least through the Outlook period (December 2011-March 2012). However, in areas affected by the crop damages – particularly the western Highlands of Guatemala, southern and southwestern Honduras, the eastern, western, and Pacific Coast areas of El Salvador, and Nicaragua’s dry corridor – household food stocks are expected to be depleted early, leading to an early start to the lean season by one or two months in approximately February/March. Food security in these affected areas is likely to be at Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels.
- Unskilled labor opportunities for cash crops (coffee, sugar, melon, and watermelon) will be normal this year, providing income through February/March for households dependent on agricultural labor. Employment opportunities will decline after February, in line with seasonal trends.

Food security outlook through March 2012

Food availability in **Guatemala** and **Honduras** has increased following the *primera* and *postera* harvests, and the ongoing harvest in Guatemala’s Highlands. *Postrera* season harvesting of red beans and white maize will continue through December, and at the national level, harvests are likely to be normal. However, more than 17,000 farmers in southern and southwestern areas of Honduras completely lost their crops. According to reports from FAO and WFP, households in these areas had almost no remaining food reserves from the *primera* harvest at the time of the tropical depression and were expecting to replenish food stocks with *postrera* harvests.

High demand for seasonal unskilled labor will continue to provide income for poor households, increasing access to food through February/March. The food security situation thereafter will deteriorate in some localized areas since reserves will last less than normal due to losses caused by Tropical Depression 12-E.

In **Nicaragua**, the situation is similar; *primera* and *postrera* harvests will improve food availability through February, though there were damages to *postrera* crops in some areas. The tropical depression damaged beans and maize crops in Leon and Estelí departments, with maize losses of 33 and 28 percent in these areas, respectively, and bean losses of 10 and 63 percent, respectively. With widespread losses to subsistence crops, the availability of maize and beans in these areas is compromised. In addition, road infrastructure is severely damaged in the dry corridor and the Pacific area, which could affect food access.

In **El Salvador**, where significant *postrera* losses are expected, households affected by the tropical depression in the eastern, western, and Pacific Coast areas of the country will also likely experience an early start to the lean season in February when harvests are expected to be exhausted. The government and humanitarian organizations continue to provide food assistance, health and hygiene supplies, and water and sanitation facilities. Six shelters are currently providing assistance to 73 families.

According to the December 2011-March 2012 Central America Outlook Forum, the cold fronts/frosts season is expected to

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be normal, with 15 cold fronts until March 2012. These cold fronts can cause damage to vegetable crops in the highlands, particularly in Guatemala. This will affect the availability of wages related to this sector, and will further reduce food availability for households already affected by excessive rains in October. Furthermore, La Niña conditions could cause irregular rains through the beginning of the *primera* season, which could potentially affect crop development in areas where this season starts early, such as the Highlands.

Markets and Trade through March 2012

Food prices in the region are expected to continue decreasing as *postrera* harvests continue. In **Guatemala**, maize prices at the national level decreased 13 percent compared to October 2011 due to harvests from the east and north of the country. Black bean prices are stable as a result of the harvest in the east, and are expected to remain stable until at least March, since most households in rural areas have reserves of basic grains.

In **El Salvador**, white maize prices have continued to decrease, up to 15 percent in retail markets and up to 22 percent in wholesale markets in the northern area. However, *seda* beans in some markets have started to increase by 2.4 percent in retail markets and 2.6 percent in wholesale markets in the west. White sorghum retail and wholesale prices have increased from the previous month (10 and 26 percent, respectively). Prices have generally remained stable since the previous month considering the losses from the tropical depression. Increases in white sorghum could be due to market speculation, utilization of the grain for animal feed and substitution of white maize among households that suffered crop losses.

In **Honduras**, prices of red beans increased 3 percent in retail markets and 13 percent in wholesale markets. White maize prices have continued to decrease, except for the southern market, where there was an increase of 2 percent since the previous month. Prices of white sorghum have also continued to decrease, with modest increases in the southern market, most likely an effect of the losses from the tropical depression and market speculation due to possible exports to El Salvador.

Food prices in **Nicaragua** are following the same pattern of the other countries. Wholesale red bean prices have increased by 3.8 percent since the previous month, although they are 51.2 percent below the same month last year. Retail prices are 1.75 percent above last month and 51.2 percent below last year. Nicaragua's *apante* season in early 2012 could help to decrease red bean prices further. In the case of white maize, prices have continued to decrease from last month's prices in wholesale and retail markets. Maize prices are also lower than October 2011 prices.