

Crisis outcomes continue in the western Dry Corridor

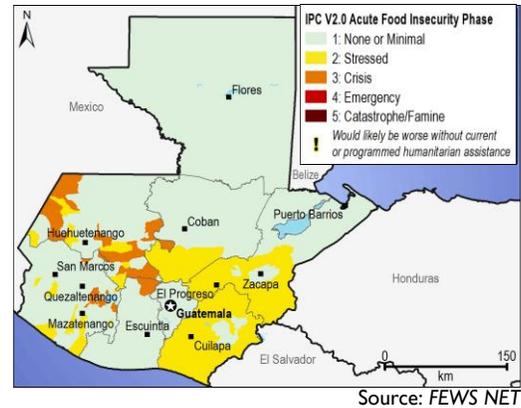
**KEY MESSAGES**

- The current El Niño, which is believed to be reaching its peak with respect to sea surface temperature (SST) anomalies in the eastern equatorial Pacific, caused a severe drought during the 2015 *Primera* season (April/May-August). According to satellite estimates, rainfall totals in much of the Dry Corridor, an area extending from the western border with Mexico to the eastern border with Honduras and El Salvador, were among the lowest in the last 35 years.
- The population of greatest concern for acute food insecurity are households in the **western temperate highlands** affected by the drought and severely diminished staple production, as well as by limited job opportunities and below-average incomes. By the end of the outlook period in March 2016, the most affected households will have been in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) for a full year. There are currently no plans for emergency assistance in these areas in the near-term.
- Due to near-average yields for beans during the *Postrera* season and some job opportunities for laborers in the cultivation of various crops, food security outcomes have improved seasonally in parts of the **East**. Area classifications will be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) through February, when agricultural labor opportunities will decline and poor households will have depleted their bean reserves. The most affected households will then return to Crisis (IPC Phase 3), requiring outside assistance to prevent food consumption gaps. The World Food Program (WFP) is planning to provide cash and food assistance to households in selected municipalities of Chiquimula, Baja Verapaz, and Jutiapa, which will likely mitigate the severity of food insecurity in these areas, maintaining Stressed (IPC Phase 2!) acute outcomes.

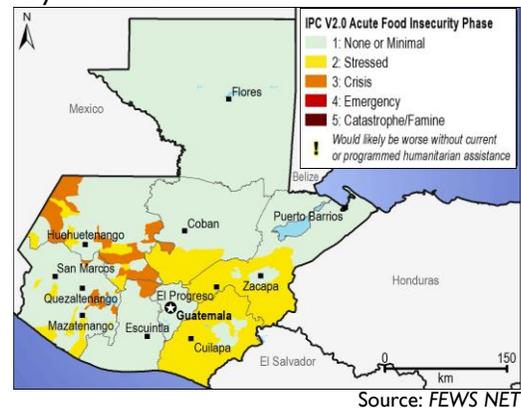
**CURRENT SITUATION**

- *Postrera* harvests are ongoing in areas with a second growing season. Yields are estimated to be near average, except in certain localized areas in the eastern part of the country affected by excessive rainfall in October and November. Domestic markets are supplied with beans from the eastern part of the country, while maize typically flows from southern Petén, the Northern Transversal Strip (low-altitude areas in the northern parts of Huehuetenango, El Quiché, and Alta Verapaz departments), and, to a lesser extent, from the southern coast.
- Producer prices for black beans and white maize were stable between October and November 2015 throughout the country, except in the northern region, including southern Petén and the Northern Transversal Strip, where the recent

**Figure 1.** Estimated food security outcomes, December 2015



**Figure 2.** Estimated food security outcomes, January - March 2016



These maps show relevant *acute* food insecurity outcomes for emergency decision-making. They do not necessarily reflect *chronic* food insecurity. For more on this scale, visit: [www.fews.net/IPC](http://www.fews.net/IPC).

maize harvest drove down prices by 5.26 percent. The stability in prices is attributable to supply from recent harvests in eastern and northern areas of the country and, to a lesser extent, on the southern coast, as well as to imports of beans and maize from Mexico. Prices are also similar to the same period of last year, except in the northern region, where bean prices are up by 5.88 percent and maize prices are down by 10 percent. Wholesale and retail prices for both white maize and black beans on monitored markets in Huehuetenango (in the western region), Chiquimula (in the eastern region), Petén (in the northern region), and Guatemala City show little movement compared with figures for last month and last year and are near the five-year average. The exception is the wholesale price of black beans in Guatemala City, which has come down by 5.9 percent due to supply from reserves and from recent harvests in the east.

- The period of high demand for agricultural labor is underway, during which employment and income opportunities improve. Labor-intensive crops providing employment for day laborers include coffee, sugar cane, melons, tobacco, African oil palms, bananas, and cardamom. This year, however, rainfall anomalies have reduced production for several of these crops, limiting work opportunities as well as compensation for day labor, according to field reports. The coffee sector is of particular concern, which has been impacted by coffee rust since the 2012/2013 season, reducing production and income from day labor. In addition, selling prices for coffee are low and expected to fall even further, which will negatively affect incomes, particularly those of small coffee growers who are not members of any association or cooperative. The situation for day laborers is more complicated. Not only do lower coffee prices lead to reduced daily pay, but the lack of rain can reduce the size of coffee beans, requiring workers to spend more time picking coffee to harvest a given weight, upon which pay is based. In addition, the repeated shocks in recent years have led the most affected households to increase the number of members searching for work, heightening competition for the limited available job opportunities this growing season.
- The government's budget deficit and the lack of funding for adequate primary health care coverage since the cancellation of the Health Coverage Extension Program at the beginning of this year has reduced vaccination coverage throughout the year, reducing it to below the threshold rates for the prevention of diseases such as polio, whooping cough, and measles, among others. This same problem has also reduced possibilities for the timely detection and treatment of acute malnutrition in children under the age of five. According to studies by the Ministry of Health, this latter indicator shows no change from last year, in terms of the prevalence of global acute malnutrition. However, there could be an increasing prevalence of more severe forms of malnutrition. However, under-reporting problems resulting from the lack of a presence at the community level do not permit the confirmation of this assertion.
- According to [forecasts by the International Research Institute for Climate and Society \(IRI\)](#), the ongoing El Niño, which is reaching its peak, is expected to continue into next year. There is a 100 percent probability of it lasting at least until the beginning of the *Primera* growing season across the country and an 85 percent likelihood of it extending through the three-month period from March through May 2016. While the most likely scenario is for near-average levels of cumulative rainfall with the expected reduction in SST anomalies in the eastern equatorial Pacific region, according to INSIVUMEH (the Seismology, Volcanology, Meteorology, and Hydrology Institute), there is still a high risk of a poor distribution of rainfall, which could affect crops during the 2016 *Primera* growing season.

## UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS

The assumptions used by FEWS NET in establishing the most likely food security scenario for the period from October 2015 through March 2016 have been updated as follows:

- The World Food Program (WFP) will deliver food and cash assistance to 23,600 households between February and May 2016 in selected municipalities of Chiquimula, Baja Verapaz, and Jutiapa Departments, in the eastern region.

## PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MARCH 2016

There has been a seasonal improvement in food access for the poorest households in most parts of the country, due to the recent harvest of *Primera* crops and ongoing harvest of *Postrera* crops, sufficient supply to markets and the resulting reduction in staple prices, and the beginning of the period of high demand for labor. The harvests of *Postrera* crops in the east, the north, and, to a lesser extent, on the southern coast, and the single annual harvest in the Western Highlands have helped replenish the food reserves for staple-producing households, making them less dependent on market purchase while at the same time improving domestic market supplies. As a result, prices have remained stable, and have declined significantly in some surplus areas. Furthermore, the annual period of high demand for agricultural labor means a seasonal improvement in income for many poor households, helping improve food access as compared with the past few months. **Households in large parts of the country unaffected by the rainfall deficit in 2015 will experience Minimal (IPC Phase 1) acute food insecurity through at least March 2016.**

The poorest households in both western and eastern parts of the Dry Corridor were severely affected by rainfall deficits as much as 75 percent below normal during the 2015 *Primera* season, causing 75 to 100 percent losses of maize crops among subsistence producers. Thus, these households were unable to replenish their maize reserves, which had been prematurely depleted by February/March 2015 due to the rainfall deficit during the 2014 *Primera* growing season. Accordingly, these households will have no reserves of self-produced maize crops, their main dietary staple, until the next harvest of *Primera* crops in September 2016, or until November 2016 in the case of households in the west. Thus, dependence on market purchases will continue until then, leaving households vulnerable to potential price hikes or projected reductions in their income from casual labor. In other words, staple foods are available on the market, but many poor households do not have the purchasing power needed to access sufficient quantities. These households normally turn to coping strategies (such as borrowing for several consecutive years or atypical patterns of migration in terms of its duration and corresponding destinations) enabling them to reduce the food consumption gaps derived from the difficulties in access. However, after several consecutive years of contending with major shocks, including rainfall anomalies and the effects of the coffee rust outbreak since 2012, many households have already employed negative strategies such as eating their seeds and selling off their productive assets, which has significantly weakened their short-term coping ability.

**Given that it does not have the possibility of a second growing season and has fewer opportunities for casual labor, the area of the Dry Corridor in the Western Highlands will remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3), which has been ongoing since April 2015. With such an extended period in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and with no plans for short-term emergency assistance, this is the area of greatest concern in the country, requiring immediate attention.**

The harvest of *Postrera* crops in the eastern part of the country is temporarily improving outcomes for households there to some extent, helping to replenish their bean reserves for two or three months and to slightly improve their incomes from the sale of part of their crops. However, the situation will begin to deteriorate beginning in March with the depletion of these reserves and the end of the period of high demand for agricultural labor. The area is expected to receive its second and final delivery of food assistance in January 2016 from a donation from the government of Brazil, supplemented by food assistance from the Guatemalan government, for 110,230 households in selected municipalities, which had originally been scheduled for September of 2015. However, even if this assistance is delivered as planned, it is not expected to alter food security outcomes during the current outlook period. On the other hand, the scheduled delivery of assistance by the World Food Program (WFP) for Chiquimula, Baja Verapaz, and Jutiapa departments between February and May 2016 would likely improve food security outcomes in targeted municipalities. **Most of the eastern region will be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) through February, moving to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in March with the seasonal contraction in income-generating opportunities and the depletion of food reserves from the harvest of *Postrera* crops. The municipalities targeted by the World Food Program (WFP) are an exception, where the delivered assistance would likely maintain outcomes in Stressed (IPC Phase 2!) between February and May.**