

## MALI Food Security Update

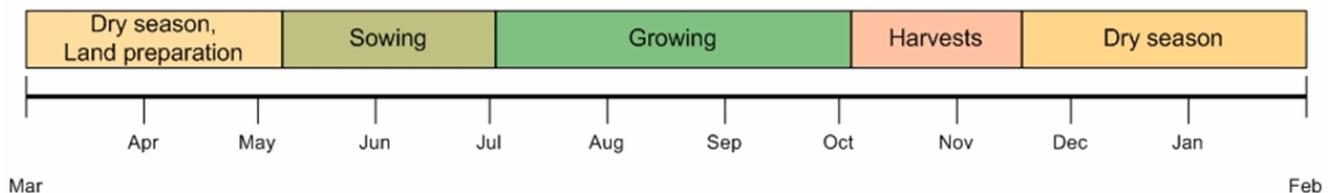
May 2007

There have been reports of rainfall all across the country since April. The precipitation continued into the first dekad of May, producing useful rains for the 2007/08 growing season. The southern part of the country has been reporting the most regular rainfall. In general, rainfall rates are below-normal, though higher than at the same time last year. This is the height of the lean period for the country's animal population. This critical phase will continue until the definitive onset of the rainy season produces new vegetative growth. Off-season farming activities continue, and land preparation efforts for rainfed crops (clearing, transportation and spreading of fertilizer) for the 2007/08 season are being accelerated in the country's major crop-producing areas. Grain supplies on markets around the country are plentiful and, in general, prices are stable.

### Seasonal calendar

2007/08 season

Start of rains



### Current food security

On the whole, the household food security in all parts of the country is still satisfactory. Households still have access to regular grain supplies on markets around the country. Grain prices are stable and, in general, are holding below price levels at the same time last year and the five-year average for the same time of year.

This is the height of the lean period for pastoralist households and their animals, until the definitive start of the rainy season in July. Grazing and watering conditions are poorer at this time of year, forcing certain animal herds to travel long distances, and milk production is normally down.

Last season's good harvests and positive trends on grain and livestock markets point to an acceptable food security outlook throughout the country for the remainder of the year.

### Farming conditions at the start of the 2007 season

Weather patterns during the first dekad of May produced measurable rainfall all across the country, particularly in farming areas of the Sudanian zone in the South (Sikasso, Bougouni, Kadiolo, Kita, Kéniéba and Koutiala), helping the 2007/08 growing season get off to a good start in these areas. However, on the whole, rainfall totals as of May 10 in these same areas are below-normal, though higher than at the same time last year, except in Sikasso and Bougouni (figure 1).

There were also reports of rainfall in the Sahelian belt in the central part of the country. However, farming activities in this area will not get underway until later in the year, after the start-of-season in the south.

In general, a look at hydrologic conditions shows the levels of rivers and streams steadily falling in all parts of the country. Water levels as of May 10 were below interannual averages at all gauging stations, with the exception of Mopti. Still, they are at or above figures for the same time last year (figure 2).

Looking ahead, the levels of all major rivers and streams will continue to fall until the rains definitively start to pick up.

**Off-season farming activities and start of the 2007/08 growing season for rainfed crops**

The main activities in the Office du Niger (ON) area in Ségou from April 20 – April 30 were ongoing off-season rice and truck farming activities and marketing operations.

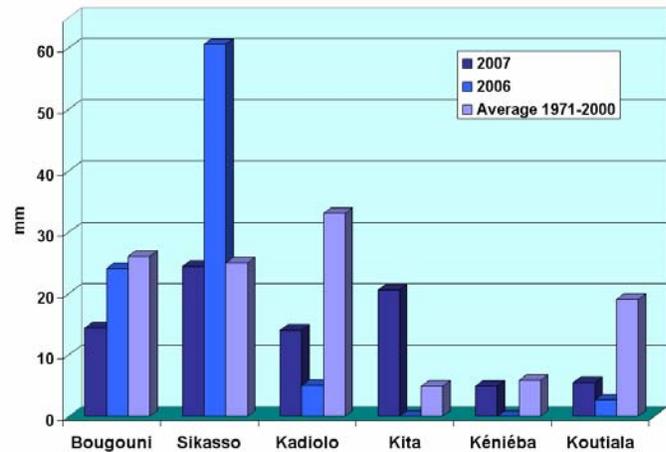
Looking at current off-season rice farming activities, 433 hectares of seedbeds had been planted as of the end of April which, technically, could yield 8,660 hectares of transplanted rice crops. Thus far, 6,093 hectares of crops have been transplanted, compared with 8,549 hectares at the same time last year. Off-season rice crops are in the heading and early maturation stages of development.

There are 5,090 hectares of land planted in truck crops, compared with 7,575 hectares at the same time last year. Harvests of certain truck crops are already in progress. The 30 hectares planted in wheat in Macina have already been harvested. In addition to the truck farming areas overseen by the Office du Niger, there are large areas planted in truck crops along irrigation canals and the banks of river branches (in plain or depression areas).

Land preparation activities for planting rainfed crops (clearing, transportation and spreading of fertilizer) for the 2007/08 growing season are already underway in major farming areas around the country.

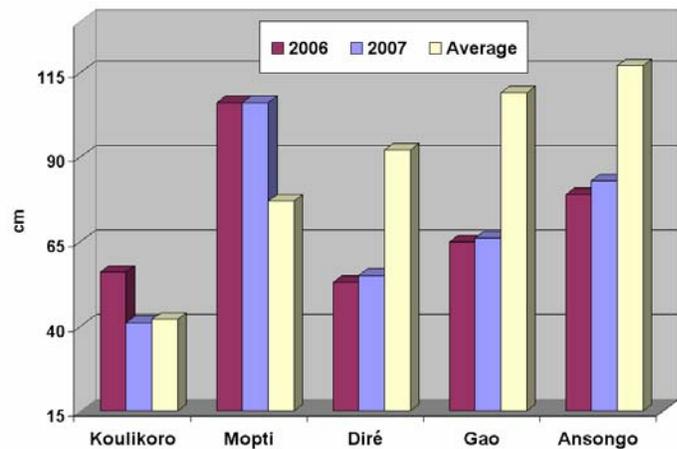
As usual, the Multidisciplinary Working Group for Agrometeorological Assistance (GTPA) has drawn up a schedule of monitoring activities for the 2007/08 agropastoral season, with 18 meetings scheduled at ten-day intervals between May 14 and November 2, along with three field trips in July, August and October along six main routes covering all parts of the country and a recap session in December. As it has in the past, FEWS NET will play an active role in monitoring the season’s progress in conjunction with its partners in Mali.

**Figure 1.** Comparison of rainfall totals as of May 10



Source: GTPA/DNM – Graphic by FEWS NET Mali

**Figure 2.** Comparison of water levels on the Niger River as of May 10



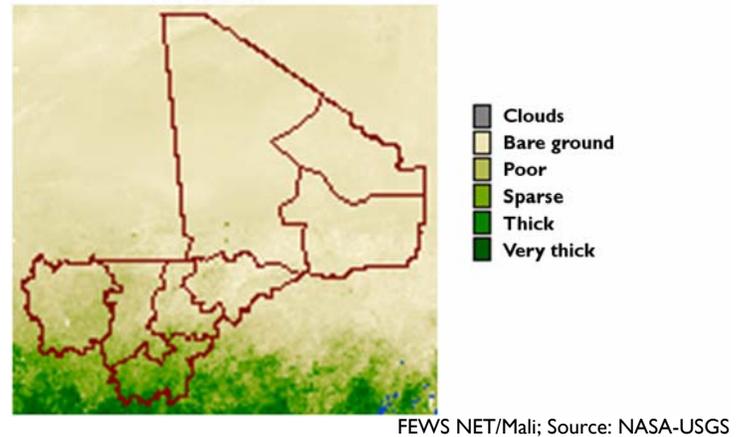
Source: GTPA/DNH – Graphic by FEWS NET Mali

### Conditions in livestock-raising areas

This is the height of the lean period for the animal population. This critical phase will continue until the definitive onset of the rains produces new vegetative growth.

Emergent pasturelands at a distance from year-round water sources (rivers) have deteriorated and in poor condition at this time of year. However, there are already signs of new aerial and ground cover in localized areas in the southern part of the country. An examination of the condition of vegetation based on the NDVI (Normalized Difference Vegetation Index) for the first dekad of May confirms the poor condition of plant cover in all livestock-raising areas (figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Condition of vegetation in the 1<sup>st</sup> dekad of May 2007  
May 1-10, 2007



On the whole, watering conditions in the vicinity of year-round water sources are relatively satisfactory. However, as is generally the case at this time of year, conditions throughout the northern reaches of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal are becoming increasingly problematic.

Animal and plant health conditions are relatively calm. As usual, the lean period is affecting the weight and condition of livestock.

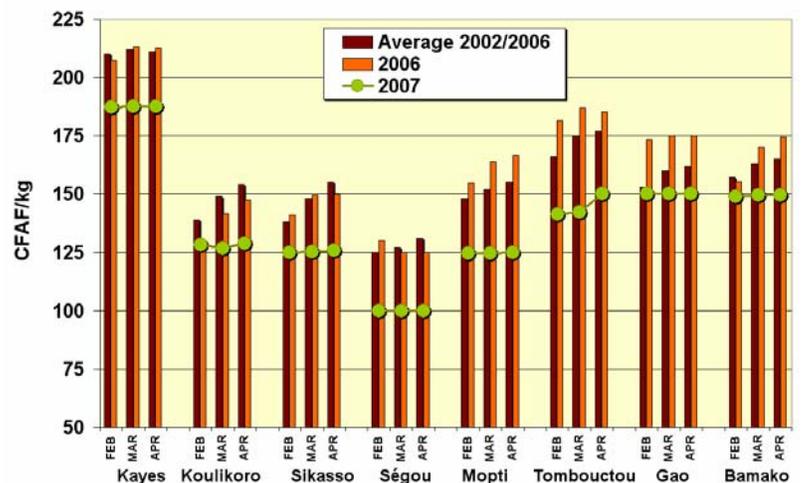
### Trends on grain markets

Markets across the country are well supplied with grains. Retail prices for coarse grain crops are holding steady on markets in regional capitals around the country. This year's price levels are below figures for the same time last year and the five-year average for the same time of year (figure 4).

Thus, right now, prices are both affordable for consumers and high enough from the farmers' standpoint. This continued price stability, rather than a steady rise in prices, would benefit farmers and consumers alike.

However, conditions at the start of the rainy season will shape future seasonal trends in prices over the next few months. Most likely, this year's prices will stay below price levels for the last three years and the average for the last five years.

**Figure 4.** Trends in average millet prices from February 2006 – April 2007 on retail markets in regional capitals, compared to 2002/06 average



Source: OMA – Graphic by FEWS NET Mali

In any event, there is no reason to expect a shortage of coarse grain crops any time this year, even at the height of the pre-harvest lean period.

## Plant health conditions and an update on the desert locust situation

On the whole, plant health conditions are relatively calm. However, there are a few reported sightings of grasshoppers in the imaginal diapause and continuous breeding stages on truck crops such as gumbo, tomatoes and cabbage, which are nearing the end of their growth cycle.

There were no sightings of desert locusts as of the end of April, and conditions are quiet in all parts of the country. According to the National Center for Locust Control, daytime temperatures range from 40 to 45 degrees Centigrade and prevailing winds are still out of the north and north-east. In the northern part of the country, there are wind storms accompanied by dust clouds. Annual vegetation is dry, and the condition of perennial vegetation is anywhere from green to withered. The soil is dry in all parts of the country and environmental conditions are not conducive to locust activity.

Right now, the locust situation in Mali is quiet but, looking ahead, this could change if the upsurge in East Africa is not brought under control, particularly with the first rains apparently coming earlier than usual.

There are intervention teams on the alert in Gao, ready in case they are needed. Moreover, canvassing crews could begin surveying northern areas of Mali as environmental conditions become more conducive to locust activity over the next few weeks.