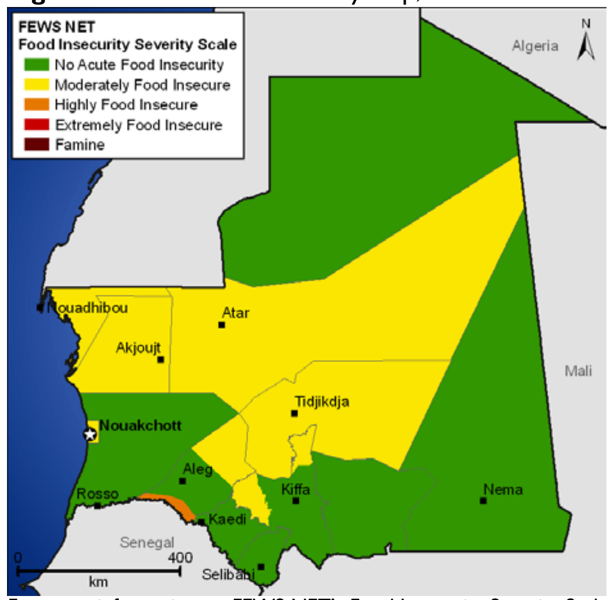
MAURITANIA Food Security Outlook

October 2010 to March 2011

- Between October and December 2010 a marked improvement is expected in most of the country's rural areas, due to rainfall promoting good pastoral and agricultural conditions. The short-cycle variety harvests have arrived, in addition to products from livestock. The terms of trade trend in favor of households selling animals despite higher prices of some basic imported foodstuffs.

- However, in the middle of the river valley and the northern pastoral zone, which are strongly dependent on recessional crops whose operations begin in late October, food security among poor households considered moderately food insecure since July evolves slowly. While poor households in northern agro-pastoral zone will see no acute food insecurity following the rainfed lowland harvests in November, those in the center of the river valley will not see similar outcomes until December, when cross-border flows of rice will normalize with falling water levels and walo harvests begin (leaves, cowpea, maize and sorghum green).

Figure 1. Current food security map, October 2010

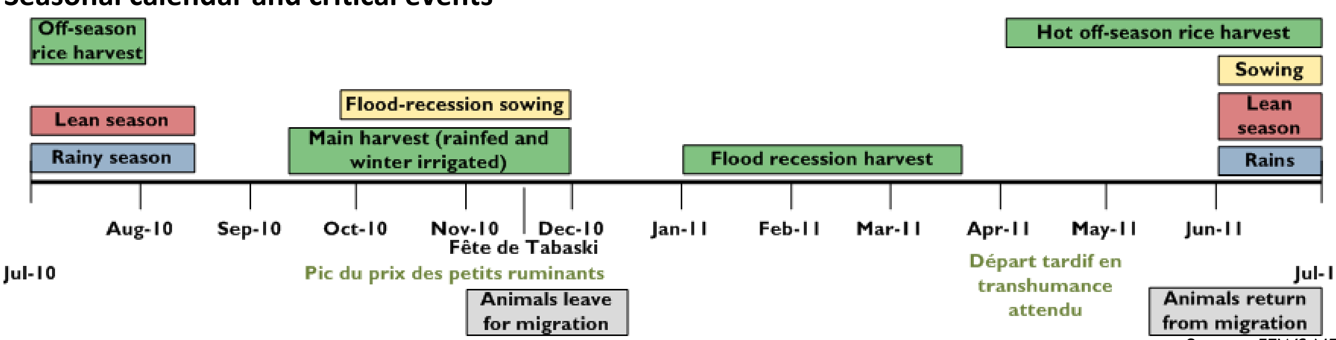


For more information on FEWS NET's Food Insecurity Severity Scale, please see: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

Source: *FEWS NET*

- Due to good grazing conditions, the prospects for agricultural production over the previous five years in all areas of livelihoods, people will recover their lifestyles according to the season, between December 2010 and March 2011.

Seasonal calendar and critical events



Source: *FEWS NET*

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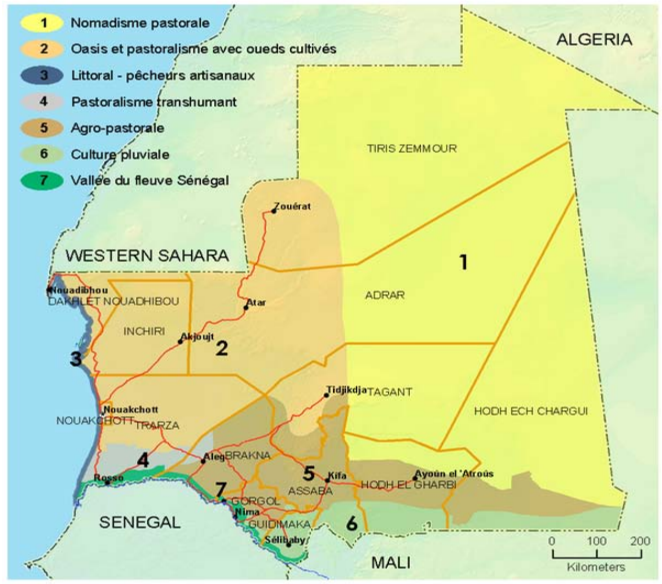
Most likely food security scenario for October 2010 through March 2011

Figure 2. Livelihood zone map



Source: *FEWS NET*

Despite pockets of moderate food insecurity (in the central reaches of the Senegal River Valley and northern agropastoral areas), food security conditions in most parts of the country are in line with normal seasonal trends. This year's efforts by the government and its partners to improve access to farm credit, transportation for farm laborers, and seed access succeeded in visibly increasing the size of the area planted in irrigated and *dieri* (rainfed) crops compared with last year. Moreover, significant rainfall and a balanced spatial-temporal distribution of precipitation helped foster good crop and pasture growth and development in rainfed farming areas (with the exception of northern agropastoral areas). There are no reports of any epizootic outbreaks, and plant health conditions are stable. Milk production, the gathering of wild plant foods, and harvests of early grain crops have improved food availability for most poor households in rural areas of the country. The seasonal slow-down in cross-border trade due to transportation problems from the rain and flooding has not affected supplies on local markets, which are still well-stocked with crops from trader inventories. Livestock-selling households are still benefiting from favorable terms of trade for sheep/grain.

The different scenarios outlined in this report for the various parts of the country for the period from October 2010 through March 2011 are based on the following assumptions:

- The high levels of dams and flood stages of rivers bode well for a major expansion in the size of viable areas for the growing of flood-recession crops (bottomland, dam, and *walo* areas) all across the country.
- Heavy demand for small animals in general and sheep in particular, peaking sometime between October and the beginning of November (the feast of Tabaski is scheduled to begin around November 17th) will give households a chance to sell their livestock at lucrative prices. Poor households in agropastoral areas growing mainly bottomland and flood-recession crops generally sell a few animals between October and December in order to pay off their debts and buy grain. These sales of livestock could extend into January, until the feast of *Mowloud*, provided traders are able to clear out most of their inventory. Livestock-selling households will benefit from better than usual terms of trade for small animals/grain.
- After three years of poor harvests of *walo* crops due to the low level of the river and attacks by crop predators, there is a shortage of seeds for flood-recession crops on local markets and prices are as much as 30 percent higher than last year. This year, poor farmers who normally buy seeds on their local market with income earned from selling livestock and/or gainful employment as farm laborers will be forced to resort to borrowing to obtain needed seed supplies.
- Rises in international market prices for wheat, barley, etc. will not have a major effect on rural markets during the harvest season between October and March.
- Markets will be well-stocked with crops and will operate normally thanks to a regular flow of domestic and cross-border trade.

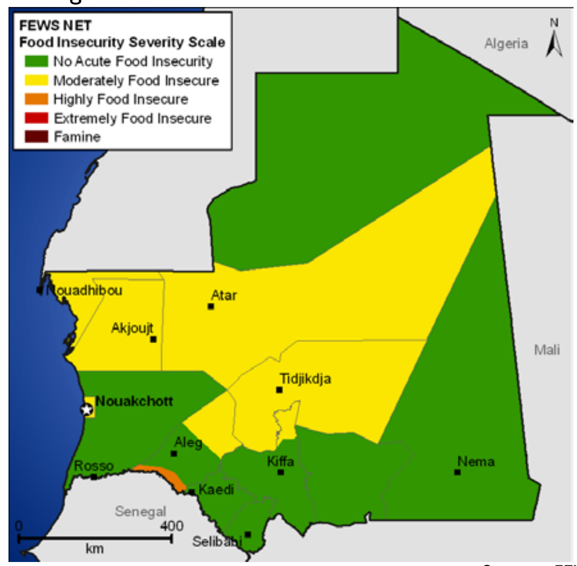
In such a scenario, all wealth groups in all livelihood zones in which pastoral activities are predominant or important should be able to resume their usual livelihoods and should face no acute food insecurity problems between January (October) and March.

Central Senegal River Valley

Some 43,000 poor farmers in this area were battling the effects of the poor harvest of *walo* crops and lack of irrigated crops for the 2009/10 season between March and August of this year. Since 2002, rice has become the main grain consumed by poor households. In general, the area devoted to growing irrigated crops in this part of the country is so small (1/4 to 1/2 ha per household) that their farming requires no outside labor other than family members.

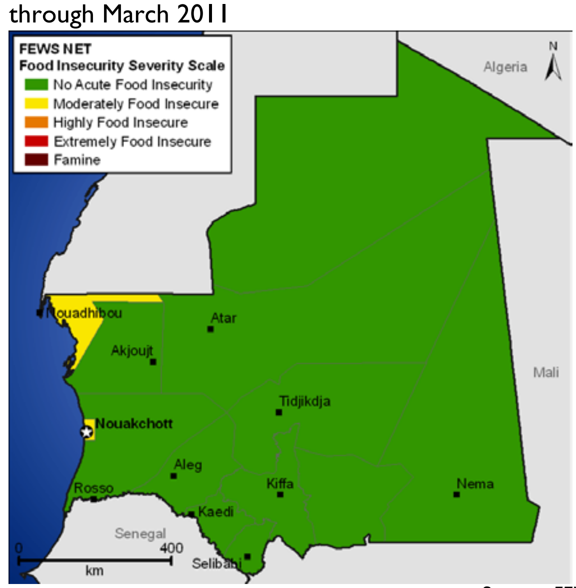
Even with the availability of farm credit in the form of cash loans beginning in July, many cooperatives got their funding late, and planting activities normally completed between July and the beginning of August extended into the middle of September. Poor households in particular resorted to the use of poor quality seeds purchased on border markets in Senegal, in many cases, at exorbitant prices. Some farmers were forced to replant their crops. With the poor quality of seeds and the late planting of these crops, rice harvests by poor farmers in particular are expected to fall short of corresponding forecasts and will not be brought in until December, instead of in October. The best rice harvests by the group of poor households normally furnish somewhere around 500 kilograms of rice. Part of these crops is generally sold right after the harvest at low prices in the vicinity of 25 UM/kg of paddy to pay off debts ranging in value from 18,000 to 25,000 UM.

Figure 4. Most likely food security scenario for October through December 2010



Source: *FEWS NET*

Figure 5. Most likely food security scenario for January through March 2011



Source: *FEWS NET*

- The level of the river will steadily fall between now and November.
- There will be an average to good grain harvest (of irrigated rice and flood recession sorghum).
- There will be good food availability on local markets.
- Catches from inland and river fishing activities between October and March will supplement food supplies.
- There will be an average to good availability of wild plant foods (mainly leaves and corn from bottomland and riverbank areas) between October and March.
- There will be normal levels of milk production between October and March, peaking in November/December.
- There will be favorable terms of trade for sheep/grain between October and January in spite of the seasonal upswing in prices for commercially marketed foodstuffs.
- Social aid mechanisms (community assistance, informal credit, etc.) will function normally.

Large areas generally planted in *walo* crops are expected to lie vacant, with farming efforts focused mainly on lowland areas under water since August due to this year's short submersion period. These lands, representing less than 40 percent of all floodplain areas, belong to land-owning aristocrats and are farmed under sharecropping arrangements based on local social ties. Thirty percent of the annual income of poor households is earned from farm work, which is not scheduled to begin until the end of October. This income is used mainly to purchase food during the first lean season. This land access problem is compounded by the problem of poor access to seeds, which are especially expensive owing to their extremely tight supply after a string of poor harvests.

Poor households will continue to purchase or borrow rice until the upcoming harvest of *walo* crops in January, whose price has been steadily climbing since June of this year. Most poor households will be unable to meet their basic food needs between October and December. After cutting back their daily food intake, they are now skipping meals and stepping up their sales of livestock. A large part of their income from livestock sales is being used to buy seeds and pay off debts incurred in 2009 and earlier this year, both of which were poor crop years. Acute malnutrition rates in this area are higher than usual. Local residents will be highly food-insecure between October and November. Beginning in December, this group of poor households should have access to wild plant foods, catches from river fishing activities, and extra food supplies from the first harvests of flood-recession crops (leaves, cowpeas, corn, etc.) Poor households should be able to resume their regular livelihoods between January and March of this coming year and should have no acute food insecurity problems until the next lean season, which normally begins sometime in May.

Northern Agro-pastoral Areas

The long dry spell in July and early August and heavy August/September rains bursting dams, dikes, and levees cut the size of the area planted in rainfed crops in July/August by 30 to 40 percent. As of October, poor predominantly farming households will be dependent on on-farm rainfed grain crop production and the gathering of wild plant foods for their food supplies due to:

- the poor pastoral conditions and mediocre grain harvests in 2009 and 2010;
- the late start of this year's rainy season and ensuing rainfall deficits reducing the size of areas planted in rainfed bottomland crops;
- their lower incomes from employment in pastoral activities as a result of the currently good pastoral conditions requiring less outside labor for the watering and feeding of animal herds.

Most poor predominantly farming households are able to fully meet their food needs only by stepping up their borrowing and reliance on assistance from the government and its partners in the field (distributions of free food aid, therapeutic feeding centers, school meal programs, food-for-work programs for the construction of dams, dikes, and levees, etc.)

There will not be much change between September and December owing to:

- the expected 30 to 40 percent smaller than usual harvests of rainfed bottomland crops as a result of the breaching of dikes and levees and poor seed access, cutting sources of food and income by nearly 5 percent compared with an average year;
- the fewer viable dam areas for the growing of crops, reducing demand for farm labor and, as a result, the income earned from these activities by poor households (15 percent in an average year);.
- the limited sales capacity of poor households, restricting their ability to capitalize on favorable trends in terms of trade;
- erratic market supplies due to transportation problems in an area where only local government centers are serviced by all-weather roads.

The situation should quickly improve as of December to one of no acute food insecurity, thanks to:

- better pastoral conditions, with harvests of rainfed crops freeing up range areas and bringing herds closer to their home base, giving poor households better access to milk supplies;
- the pick-up in business on area livestock markets with the end of the holiday season and the slow-down in livestock imports from southeastern agropastoral areas (in central and southern Assaba, Hodh el Chargui, and Hodh el Gharbi). The return of Mauritanian and Senegalese traders will visibly drive up livestock prices and strengthen terms of trade, giving poor households better access to commercially marketed foodstuffs;
- a normal supply of environmental products between October and March;
- an extremely brisk flow of domestic trade among rainfed farming areas, southern agropastoral areas, and the Senegal River Valley through which most of the rice from Senegalese border markets is shipped in transit;
- a normal pattern of rural-urban migration.

The necessity of paying off past due debts will force this group of households to limit their food purchases, whose herds are too small for them to sell enough animals to meet both these needs simultaneously. Poor, predominantly farming households will be moderately food-insecure between October and December.

These households should face no acute food insecurity problems between December and March of next year thanks to the upcoming harvest of rainfed bottomland crops beginning in December.

Table 1. Feasible events liable to change the most likely scenario in the next six months

Area	Event	Effects on food security conditions
Nationwide	Sharp rise in staple food prices	• More limited household food access; • Reversal of what had been favorable household terms of trade for livestock/food products.
	Infestation of locusts or other crop pests	• Sizeable losses of crops and large production shortfalls for flood-recession crops, which will still be green between November and March.
	Suspension or limitation of cross-border trade with Mali and North Africa in connection with possible growing security threats in northern and eastern Mauritania	• Tight market supplies in Nouakchott (coarse grains and rice), rainfed farming areas (coarse grains), agropastoral areas, and the Senegal River Valley (rice and coarse grains); • Lower incomes for Mauritanian pastoralists from sales of livestock in Mali and Senegal; • Decline in remittances by migrant workers in the Niger River Delta area of Mali to poor households in the southeastern part of the country.
	Rising international market prices for wheat, barley, etc. , with a major impact on markets in Nouakchott	• Hikes in consumer prices due to growing demand (with households falling back on other types of grain); • Tight supplies in Nouakchott and, as a result, on rural markets normally provisioned by Nouakchott.
	Epizootic outbreak as a result of the limited vaccination coverage of small animals accounting for most of the livestock owned by poor households	• Poorer access to milk supplies; • Less wage income from pastoral activities for poor households; • High animal mortality rates affecting the main assets and source of savings of poor households; heightened food insecurity risks.
Central Senegal River Valley	Rapid recession of floodwaters beginning early in October (which, ideally, should not happen until the end of October)	• Smaller cropped area and harvests of *walo* crops; • Less wage income from farm work for poor households.
	Further flooding from late-season rains and/or releases of water from the Manantalli dam	• Flooding and losses of previously planted *walo* crops, requiring replanting and, thus, increasing production costs.
	Seed aid program in the central reaches of the Valley	• Sizeable boost in earned income from farm work and grain production; • Food security levels for most poor households in line with normal seasonal trends as of February of next year and no acute food insecurity.