

Summary

Most of July was characterized by good to very good moisture conditions, thanks to good rains that fell during the second and the third dekads of July.

Agricultural activities are progressing well throughout Burkina Faso, although some areas, such as the Mouhoun Region and the upper north Sahel Region, are lagging behind due to the delayed arrival of rainfalls. Most cereal crops have reached the stage of height growth, while cowpeas, peanuts, and cotton are branching out already.

In terms of food accessibility, most markets remained well supplied with the staple cereals, millet, sorghum and maize. July prices in most areas were much lower than July prices in recent years and the 1995-99 average. On the whole, the country continued to enjoy favorable food security conditions. Areas such as Madjoari village in East Region should be closely monitored, however, in view of their current inaccessibility to markets during the rainy season.

1. Food Availability

1.1. Rainfall Conditions and Vegetative Growth

Except for the first dekad, which was essentially dry, most of July was characterized by good to very good moisture conditions. According to satellite imagery, heavy to very heavy rains (100-150 mm) fell during the third dekad of July in Yatenga, Passore, Sourou, Kossi, Houet, Kenedougou, and Comoe Provinces. As a result, vegetative growth throughout the country appeared "greener" and better than average. Nevertheless, the drier conditions that prevailed during the first dekad of July affected farmer plans for planting cotton in some areas. In Mouhoun Region, which was most affected, only 24,526 hectares out of 66,729 hectares were sown as of late July. Consequently, some farmers are likely to lose income this year in those areas where cotton is the major cash crop or source of income.

1.2. Pasture and Livestock Conditions

Pasture and livestock conditions were generally good and satisfactory during July. In the northern/Sahel region, in particular, where livestock activities constitute the major source of income and means for acquiring food, the extent of vegetative cover appeared similar or even better than average in most areas. This favorable situation was confirmed by the inter-ministerial working group (including FEWS NET) that monitors the performance of the growing season (*Groupe inter-ministeriel de travail pluridisciplinaire*, or GTP) during its field assessments during late July. The combination of good pasture, ample water and healthy animals augurs well for herders and others whose livelihoods depend on livestock activities in these areas.

1.3. Cropping Activities

Except for the North and Sahel regions, most planting of cereal was completed by the end of July. On the other hand, sowing of non-cereal crops, such as peanuts and cowpeas, continued in several areas, including the center plateau, east, and the northern parts of the country.

Due to the progression of seasonal rainfall from south to north, crop development in the south, southwest and east appeared more advanced than crop development in the rest of the country. In turn, agricultural activities in the center plateau appeared further ahead in terms of plant growth of the northern/Sahel parts of the country. Most cereals were at the height growth stage throughout the country as of late July, save for the upper north zones where crops were just emerging or still being planted in some areas. With respect to non-cereal crops, cowpeas in the more advanced areas were branching out already and cotton was in the stage of producing buds in some areas.

One area to watch is the Mouhoun Region in the southwest where relatively drier conditions in June and early July prevented farmers from sowing their crops on schedule. Nevertheless, thanks to the resumption of rains in late July, most cereal crops can still reach maturity with adequate moisture, provided that no further disturbances occur. Considering that Mouhoun constitutes one of the major grain supplying areas in the country, this situation will need to be closely monitored during the weeks and months ahead.

1.4. National Food Availability

As of late July, reports from most areas suggest that food from the 1999 harvest remained adequately available throughout the country. At the rural household level, most families continued to rely on their own stocks. At the market level, supplies of staple foods also remained high in most parts of the country. The only exception was Madjoari in Tapoa Province (East Region) where it was reported that the supply of cereals was dwindling because of poor road conditions that prevent the area from being adequately supplied.

2. Food Accessibility

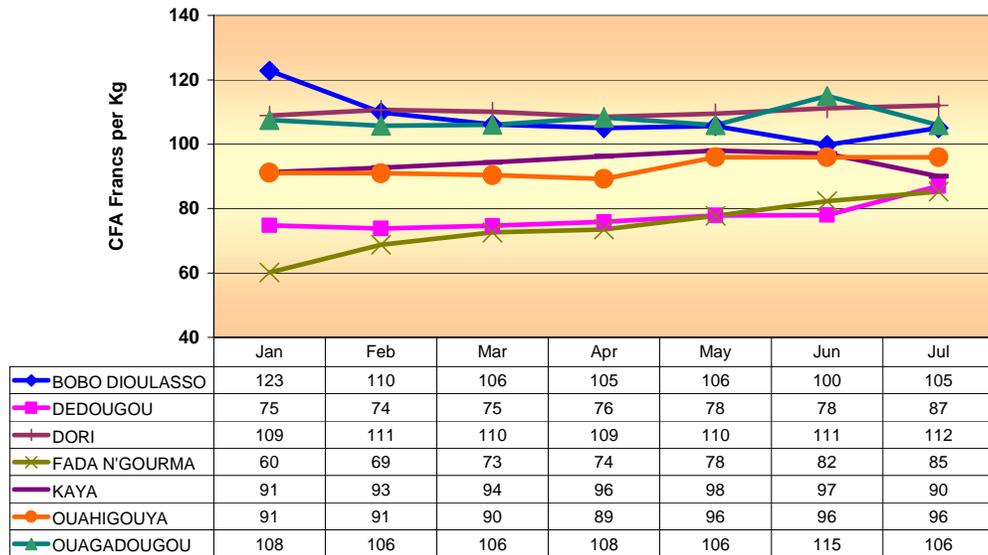
2.1. Food Access in Major Reference Markets

The discussion of market prices and food access conditions is presented below, based on data and information from the Market Information System (SIM) of Burkina Faso.

With respect to millet, the main cereal staple after sorghum, prices across the main reference markets were on the order of 97 CFA per kg as of late July (Figure 1). The post-harvest price spread seen in January 2000 (where, for example, the average price of millet in Bobo Dioulasso was twice as expensive as in Fada N'gourma) narrowed considerably by July. Average monthly market prices appear fairly stable and aligned with each other. This suggests that the major markets are reasonably integrated, a factor that expands market opportunities to the benefit of producers, traders and consumers alike. Perhaps more importantly, no markets show any abrupt pre-harvest period price increases.

Figure 2 shows that millet prices thus far this year remain consistently lower than millet prices last year and considerably lower than millet prices in 1998, following a poor harvest. Some prices this year (Dedougou, Fada N'gourma and Kaya) are less than half of the prices in 1998. Since most households were essentially food secure in 1999, it can be concluded that households who buy millet as their major staple food should be much better off this year compared to the previous seasons at the same period of time.

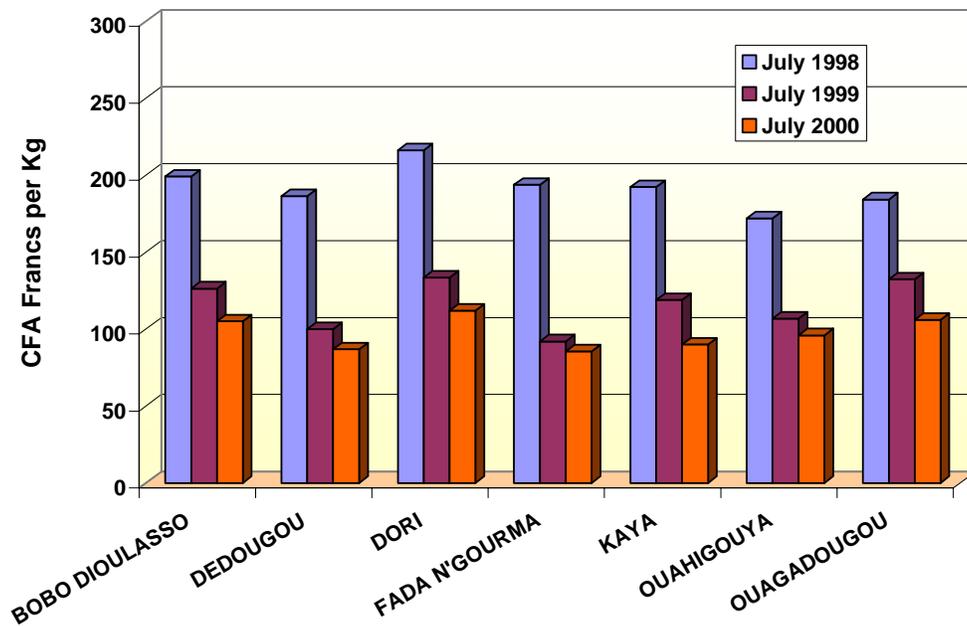
Figure 1. Food Access Conditions based on Millet Prices in Reference Markets in Burkina Faso: January - July 2000



FEWS NET/Burkina Faso; Source: SIM

Similar trends (not shown) were observed for sorghum and maize. In light of these considerations, food access conditions as of July may be considered quite favorable and affordable for most average households in the country. Nevertheless, the situation of inaccessible areas, such as Madjoari, needs to be monitored throughout the season.

Figure 2. Inter-annual Comparison of Millet Prices in Reference Markets in Burkina Faso in July: 1998 - 2000



FEWS NET/Burkina Faso
Source: SIM

2.2 New Project Developments and Major Policy Changes

Several new project developments or major policy changes during July are worth noting:

- The Republic of China (Taiwan) donated 425 new tractors for Burkinabe farmers. The total value of these tractors was estimated at 424,800,000 CFA or over \$600,000 USD.
- USAID and the Plan International Office in Burkina Faso will start a new US\$2 million project for improving child nutrition and health in the center-east zone of the country.
- The World Bank and the Burkina Faso Government have signed an agreement to extend the National Soils Management Program (PNGT) for another five-year phase. The extension, which is worth 73 billion CFA, aims to improve agricultural, livestock, as well as agro-forestry activities in 2,000 villages from the 26 poorest provinces in the country.

The combined effect from all these projects has the potential to bring about better food security for Burkinabe households over the medium to long term in the country.

3. Vulnerability Update

By and large, Burkina Faso continued to enjoy favorable food security conditions as of July. Nevertheless, one particular situation stands out. The population in Madjoari Department has begun experiencing food supply problems due to the poor road conditions that render the area practically inaccessible each year after the rains have settled in. This situation is another argument for building appropriate road systems as a means to contribute to improving the food security of inaccessible localities in the country. Since this is a recurring problem, affecting many localities at some point each year, FEWS NET believes that concerned policy- and decision-makers should seriously consider building connector roads in rural areas as a major priority if all parts of the country are to obtain food security.

FEWSNET will continue monitoring this situation along with any other potentially food insecure zones throughout the season.