

Informed sources predict a major crop production deficit of about 280,000 MT this year, while people in some localities are already calling for help.

Highlights

Basic food commodities remained available throughout the country as of mid-October. Most reference markets continued to be adequately supplied with cereal and pulses. Prices in most localities appeared to be fairly stable and lower than prices in previous seasons. Nevertheless, farmers and traders in some localities are holding on to their grain stocks instead of selling. As a result, prices are climbing in areas where the outcome of the growing season hangs in the balance. In Yatenga Province, for instance, it is reported that 25,000 people from Kalsaka and Rambo are already experiencing serious hardships in meeting their daily consumption needs already. In the better-off areas, however, early-maturing crops are becoming available, hence helping to reduce household dependence on the market for their daily food needs.

Most of September through early October was characterized by sparse and poorly distributed rainfall. Moreover, the rains abruptly — and prematurely — stopped in early October. Even in areas where crops were able to reach maturity, severe attacks on the crops by birds and pests are already reducing the prospects for a good harvest in some localities.

Consequently, a major production shortfall is likely to occur this year, an assessment that is clearly corroborated by satellite imagery as well as by findings from recent field trips. According to informed sources, the projected cereal production deficit could be as high as 280,000 MT. If this projection proves true, it would be the largest deficit to face the country in four years. In order to prevent food security from worsening, the Government has already taken the initiative through the National Committee for Emergency Assistance and Rehabilitation (CONASUR) to provide at least 10 MT of cereals to all provinces or localities considered to be most affected by current distress or looming food insecurity.

Moreover, the reduced rainfall has prevented most water points from refilling to capacity. In some localities, rivers and water-points have dried up already, to the serious detriment of agro-pastoral and off-season crop production activities over the next few months. Consequently, the government and its concerned partners should look for ways to assist those in need while it is still possible to mitigate the most harmful threats to people's livelihoods. There will be fewer opportunities for the affected agro-pastoral people to cope, should food security conditions worsen.

In light of all these considerations, the government and its partners should not only help all those in need to better cope, but also provide them with the necessary means to regain their productive capacity before the next growing season begins.

1. Analysis

1.1. Current Food Security Status

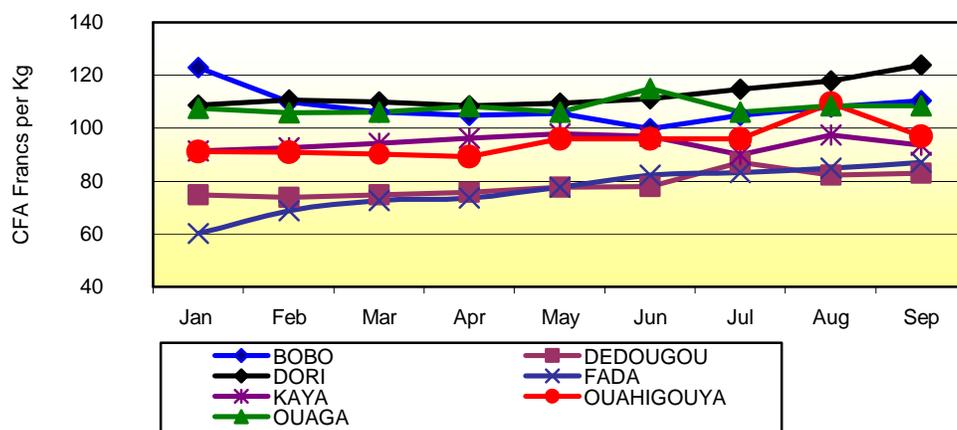
1.1.1. Food Availability

Basic food commodities remained largely available throughout the country. Most markets continue to be well supplied with cereals and pulses. In addition, harvesting of maize, millet, groundnuts, *voandzu* (Bambara nuts), and tubers has begun in several areas, reducing the dependence of some households on the market for meeting their daily food needs. Areas where the first harvests have already begun include the Center West (Ziro, Sissili), South West (Comoé, Hauts Bassins), and parts of the Center East and Eastern regions.

Some food availability problems were reported, however, in a number of localities, especially where the performance of the growing season was not very encouraging. This was particularly the case for Kalsaka and Rambo (Yatenga Province), Madjoari (Kompienga Province), and several other departments in the Center North region (especially in Namentenga). In light of the poor performance thus far this growing season, some traders and farmers preferred holding their remaining stocks — as a way to ensuring their own food security — instead of bringing them to the market for sale. As a result, the level of food supplies in some markets decreased further compared to demand.

During a recent field trip undertaken with the Multi-disciplinary Working Group (*Groupe de Travail Pluri-disciplinaire, GTP*), FEWS further learned that food supplies were increasingly becoming hard to find in the Rambo area. At least 25,000 people — or one-third of the combined population from Kalsaka and Rambo — are already experiencing difficulties in meeting their food consumption needs. In some villages in Rambo, in particular, some households were reportedly relying on wild leaves, such as the *Balanites and Heptadenia*, as their main food to meet consumption needs. This clearly denotes a serious situation, requiring that appropriate assistance be provided urgently to those concerned. Authorities in charge of the national food security stocks as well as NGOs and development partners concerned with food security in Burkina Faso should closely monitor this situation and provide appropriate assistance as warranted.

**Figure 1. Staple Millet Prices across Major Reference Markets:
January - September 2000**

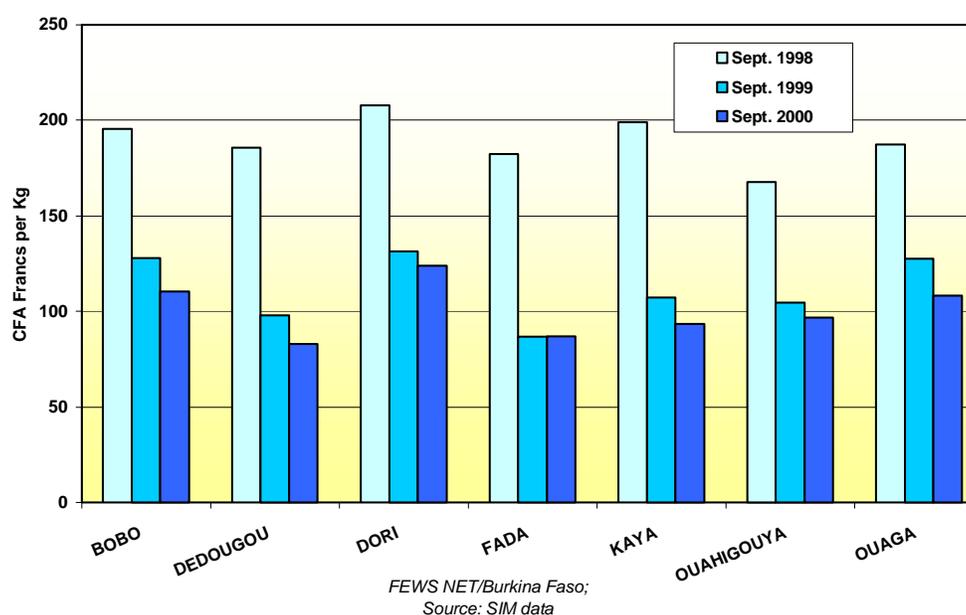


FEWS NET/Burkina Faso
Source: SIM

1.1.2. Food Accessibility

Food access conditions remain satisfactory. Similar to 1999 when food access conditions remained satisfactory throughout the year, the Market Information System (*Système d'Information des Marchés, SIM*) has reported that from September through October 10, prices across most major reference markets remained fairly stable and low compared to the previous months (Figure 1). In fact, the level of current prices was even lower than levels in the same period in both 1998 and 1999 (Figure 2). The only exception was the Fada market where prices were similar for both 1999 and 2000. In spite of this situation, reports from the field have noted some net increases in cereal prices from several localities, especially in Yatenga, Yagha, Namentenga, Samatenga and northern Mouhoun. This situation will be closely monitored by FEWS NET to assess the possible impact these price increases have on food access in the coming months.

Figure 2. Interannual Comparison of Staple Millet Prices across Major Reference Markets: 1998 - 2000

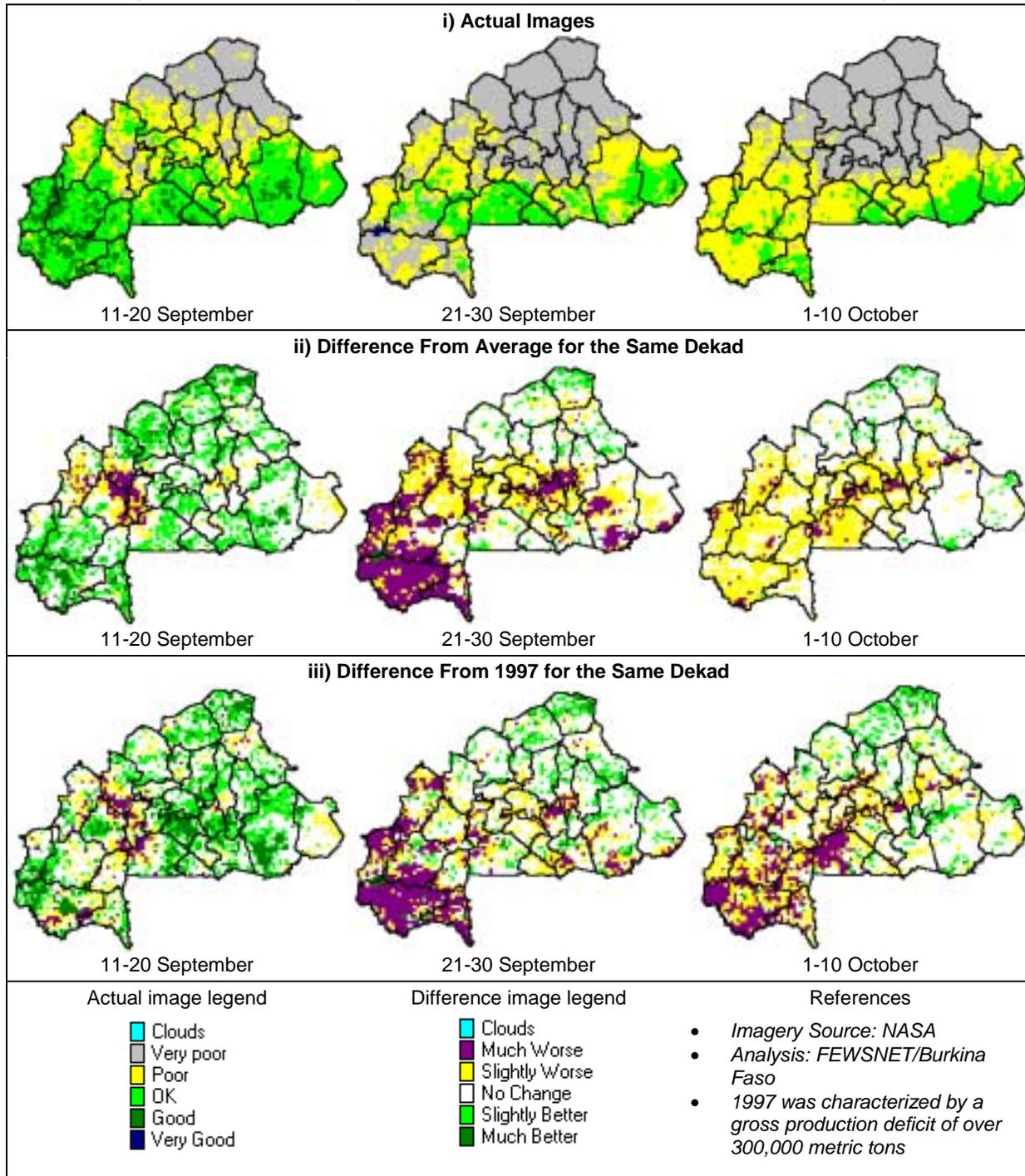


1.2. Prospects for Food Security

Most of September through the first dekad of October was characterized by sparse and poorly distributed rainfall compared to both last year and the 30-year average (1961-90). For example, in the Sahel region most localities registered significantly lower rainfall in 2000 than in 1999. Specifically, recorded rainfall this year to date decreased by 131.6 mm in Dori (Seno Province), 248.1 mm in Djibo (Soum Province), 87.2 mm in Gorom-Gorom (Oudalan Province) and 177.7 mm in Sebba (Yagha Province). Likewise in Passore Province, rainfall in the three localities of Yako, Arbollé, and Bokin dropped by 216.6 mm, 339.8 mm, and 357.5 mm, respectively, compared to 1999. Even in the Southwest region which normally produces a major share of the grain basket in Burkina Faso, a similar situation was deplored in several localities, such as Békuy, Béréba (Tuy Province), N'Dorola (Kéné Dougou Province), Dandé, Karangasso Houet Province), as well as extended zones in northern Mouhoun. Unfortunately, rainfall observed in the rest of the country was not any better, except in some localities in the East and Southwest regions.

This seasonal lower rainfall coupled with the agronomic drought that set in starting mid-August, contributed to the poor development of crops in many localities as well as newly planted crops. Even in areas where crops were able to reach maturity before the rains stopped early, severe attacks on the crops by birds and pests have been reported. Thus, all these factors combined indicate disquieting food security prospects during the coming months in the country. Analysis of the satellite imagery analysis supports these findings (Figure 3).

Figure 3. State of Vegetative Growth (NDVI) based on Satellite Imagery



2. National Trends

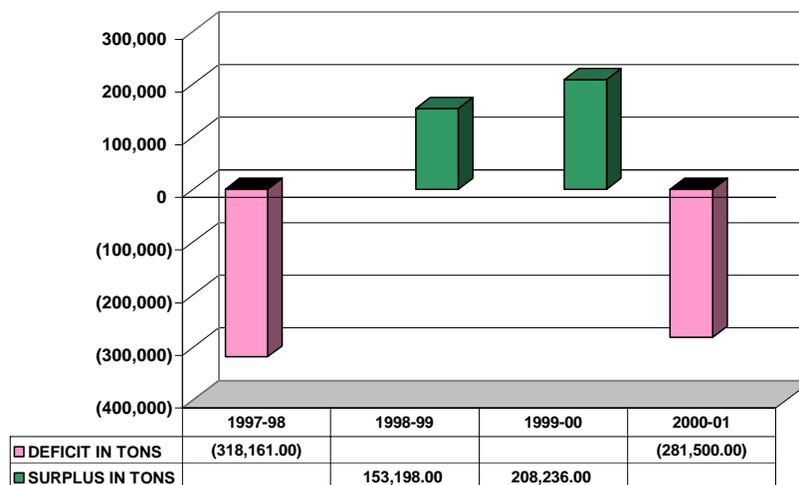
Hazards refer to external conditions, or shock factors, that have specific economic consequences for specific populations or livelihood groups. When hazard information is combined with an understanding of vulnerability, the ways by which specific populations or livelihood groups normally obtain access to food and income, it is possible to assess the risk of a food shortage for the group for a specified timeframe.

2.1. Hazard information # 1: The prolonged agronomic drought from mid-August through the first dekad of October, combined with some severe attacks on maturing crops by birds and other pests in many localities point to an overall production shortfall this year in Burkina Faso.

Owing to the early withdrawal of the rainfall as well as the prolonged agronomic drought that started since mid-August in many localities, prospects for the growing season are not very encouraging. In fact, crops from many localities throughout the country failed to complete their growth cycle due to excessive water stress. To make matters worse, various pests (including grain-eating birds) reportedly have had a severe impact on large areas of crops that were able to reach maturity. Moreover, the northern parts of Mouhoun region — which are traditionally considered as part of the grain-basket of the country — were particularly affected by the agronomic drought. As a result, an overall agricultural production shortfall this year appears increasingly likely.

The harvest outcome for the West and South West regions could vary from slightly below to much-below average. This is significant since this is the largest cereal-producing zone in Burkina Faso. In some localities, the situation could even be worse than 1997, which was characterized by a major production shortfall of over 318,000 MT. During a recent field trip that was convened by Government in association with several NGOs and development partners (including FEWS NET), many farmers observed that their production losses this year would amount to at least 30-40% higher compared to average. This seems to be consistent with the preliminary estimates released by the CONASUR, which projects an overall national production deficit of about 280,000 metric tons. If this deficit proves true, the 2000 harvest would be the worst agricultural season nationally since 1997.

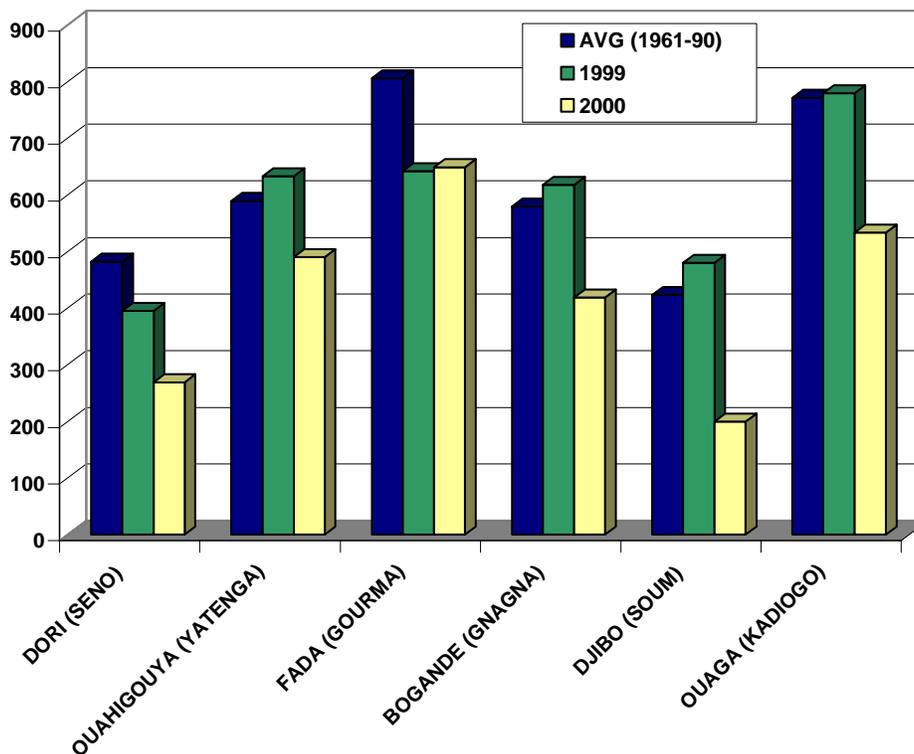
Figure 4. Cereal Production Surpluses and Deficits (MT) in Burkina Faso: 1997 - 2000



Adapted from sources by FEWS NET BURKINA FASO

The size of the national production deficit is expected to be about the same as in 1997 (Figure 4). It is worth noting that in 1997 at least 67,000 MT of emergency food aid was distributed for meeting the needs of food insecure populations following a similar widespread crop failure.

Figure 5. State of Seasonal Cumulative Rainfall as of October 10 in Selected Localities (mm)



FEWS NET/Burkina Faso
Source: National Meteorological Services

2.2. Hazard information #2: Owing to the observed below-normal rainfall throughout the country, severe water shortages are likely soon to occur in many localities

Significantly lower cumulative rainfall compared to average and 1999 was reported from most localities as of October 10 (Figure 5). Likewise, most rivers, dams, streams, wells, and low-lying areas were not refilled to capacity, as is normally the case in a good year. Except for Loumbila and Ouaga #3 dams (Kadiogo Province), most water points were anywhere from 50% to less than 90% of their normal capacity in October.

This clearly suggests that potentially severe water shortages could soon arise in some localities. For instance, during a GTP field trip taken in early October, FEWS NET noted in particular that more than half of the Dori water point (*mare*) had dried out already. Usually in a normal year, this *mare* should be overflowing and remain filled until January or February. A similar situation was also observed from many other parts of the country. The net implication is that significantly less water might be available this year for meeting both animal and human needs, including both off-season agricultural production as well as agro-pastoral activities. Water shortages are likely to further aggravate food insecurity for those who failed to produce enough this year to meet their annual consumption requirements. Likewise, water shortages may also increase the level of vulnerability for those populations who largely depend on their livestock for their living and access to food.

In light of these considerations, the authorities in charge should begin thinking of which ways or actions ought to be taken in order to minimize the risks of food insecurity, as well as potential losses of livestock during the months ahead.

2.3. Non-hazard information #1: Potential seed shortages problems for the coming agricultural season are already foreseen

As noted above, many localities this year are likely to experience a major agricultural production shortfall. In the worst cases, some households may not harvest enough to meet their food needs for even a month or two. Because of this situation, many producers are concerned that they may not have enough seed rain left for planting in the next growing season. Although this is potentially worrisome, neighboring countries such as Mali, Niger, Chad and Senegal provide a good source of improved seed varieties that are adapted to similar agro-ecological conditions found in Burkina Faso. The authorities can already purchase or place orders for the delivery of quality seed in preparation for next year's growing season. Timely and concrete measures like this can indeed contribute in promoting not only agricultural production, but also reduce significantly the risk of food insecurity in the country.

3. Problem Areas

3.1. Problem Area #1: Update on agronomic drought / water stress affected areas

Since the rainfall significantly declined between mid-September and the first dekad of October, the situation of crops in those localities that were already being affected by a severe water stress or agronomic drought did not improve much during the period under review. In fact, the situation in most cases worsened due to the early withdrawal of rainfall before most crops have had a chance to complete their growth cycle. As of October, areas where it is almost certain that crop production will fail include:

- In the Center West region: Kokologo, Poa, Kindi, Nadiala, Pela, Nanoro, Didyr, Godyr, and Sabou
- In the North region: Kalsaka, Rambo, Kossouka, Thiou, Kain, Bahn, Sollé, Ingané, Yako, Zogoré, Bokin, and Gourcy
- In the Sahel region: Oursi, Deou, Tin-Akoff, Koutougou, Falagountou, Titabé, and Higa (Tinkougounadié)
- In the Center North region: Barsalogo, Pensa, Namissiguima, Sabcé, Guibaré, Tikaré, Kongoussi, Boulasa, Tougouri, and Yalgo
- In the Center and East region: Boussé, Bogandé, and most localities in northern Gnagna
- In the West/Southwest region, Békuy, Béréba (Tuy Province), N'Dorola (Kéné Dougou Province), Dandé, Karangasso (Houet Province), as well parts of northern Mouhoun.

Given this situation, FEWS NET will closely monitor the food security situation in these localities, one of the top priorities during the months ahead.

3.2. Problem area #3: Update on the landlocked situation of Madjoari (Kompienga, East Region)

The food security situation in Madjoari continued to be as precarious as before. Nevertheless, considering the early recess of the rains, the roads soon should become passable to allow food supplies to reach the area again.

4. State of Burkina Faso Contingency Plans

In light of the on-going situation, which raises a lot of concerns, CONASUR, the national agency for food emergency assistance and rehabilitation, recently stated that the national food security stocks were as of October estimated at 37,000 MT. In addition, available cash to make supplemental food purchases, if necessary was considered to be on the order of 3.5 billion CFA francs (reported in *Sidwaya*, No.4127 of October 23, 2000). Thus, Burkina Faso has sufficient resources to meet some of its preliminary food assistance needs, if necessary. Indeed, CONASUR has revealed that at least 10 metric tons were dispatched to all provinces considered to be very much affected already by serious food insecurity or hardships. Nevertheless, if the projected production deficit is confirmed, assistance from the donor community may be required.

5. Conclusions

The 2000 growing season is now almost completed, with the harvest expected in November. In most localities, the rains have been poor — both in amount and distribution — and also short due to a premature end. The first harvests of early-maturing crops have begun in some localities. Due to the prolonged water stress that persisted from mid-August through October along with the early withdrawal of rainfall, the harvest outcome for this season will likely be considerably below average. In some localities, the crop production indeed will hardly suffice to meet most food consumption needs beyond three to four months. Already, preliminary estimates released from informed sources project a national production deficit of at least 280,000 metric tons. If this scenario were confirmed, this season would be the worst agricultural harvest since 1997. Unfortunately, off-season crop production as well as agro-pastoral activities may be also compromised, given the very limited rainfall, which prevented the normal replenishing of most water points.

In light of all these considerations, the government and its partners should not only help all those in need to better cope, but also provide them with the necessary means to regain their productive capacity before the next growing season begins.