

# HAITI Food Security Alert

April 14, 2008

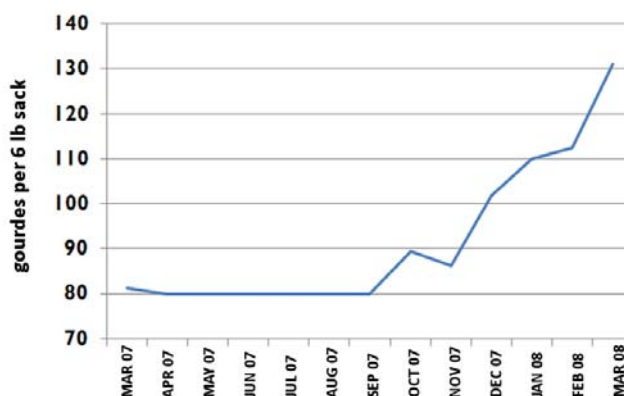
## Rising prices, demonstrations jeopardize food security

Prices for staple foods such as rice have rising steadily for the past six months (Figure 1) due, mainly, to:

- soaring international market prices for rice, wheat, corn, and cooking oil;
- last season's poor harvest; and
- high inflation (estimated at 14 percent in March, up from last year), fueled by hikes in food and oil prices.

Current high food prices are jeopardizing food security in both rural and urban areas of Haiti, triggering violent demonstrations in the nation's capital and in other large cities. These demonstrations virtually paralyzed all business activity from April 3 - 12. On April 12, the Haitian president announced a series of measures designed to quickly lower the price of rice by approximately 16 percent (through a 10 percent price subsidy and a price cut of close to 6 percent by major importers). He also introduced a package of measures geared to improving the short, medium and long-term availability of staple foodstuffs, including rice. While working to implement these latter measures, the government and the donor community should also begin implementing the joint response plan and should try to raise additional needed funding. Preliminary estimates put unfunded needs under the plan at US \$134 million.

**Figure 1.** Price of imported rice in Port au Prince (March 2007 to March 2008)



Source: CNSA/FEWS NET/USAID

The response plan was crafted by a group of experts coordinated by the CNSA (the National Food Security Agency), including representatives of the Office of the Prime Minister, the WFP, UNDP, OCHA, UNICEF, MARNDR (the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development) and FEWS NET/USAID. The plan's objective is to improve the short and medium-term availability and access to staple food items by creating jobs, revitalizing the agricultural sector, and providing food aid to vulnerable population groups. It is targeted at some two million residents of poor urban and rural areas that were hardest hit by food insecurity problems. These households are concentrated mainly in the country's Northwestern, Northeastern, and Central departments, where households are faced with chronic vulnerability factors (such as poverty and environmental degradation) and are also feeling the effects of last season's poor harvests. Right now, the Haitian population can be classified as moderately to highly food-insecure. A repeat of recent public protests could further heighten current food insecurity. In fact, if the private sector is afraid to invest in the economy, and the potential for job creation will be limited, and there will be few additional income-earning opportunities created. Moreover, a contraction in business activity would trigger layoffs.

### Recommendations

In light of current conditions and the recently crafted emergency response plan, it is recommended that:

- The government and its food security partners raise as much funding as possible to finance the response plan.
- In implementing the response plan, stakeholders should incorporate ongoing activities that strengthen good governance, promote decentralization and increase political participation. Combining response and governance activities will better target aid in the hardest hit areas of the country.