

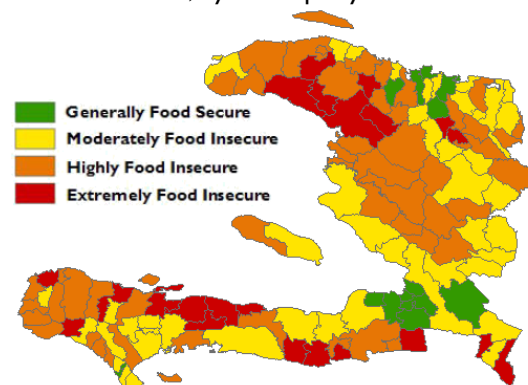
HAITI Food Security Update

N° 37/ Coverage period: November 1- 30, 2008

November 2008

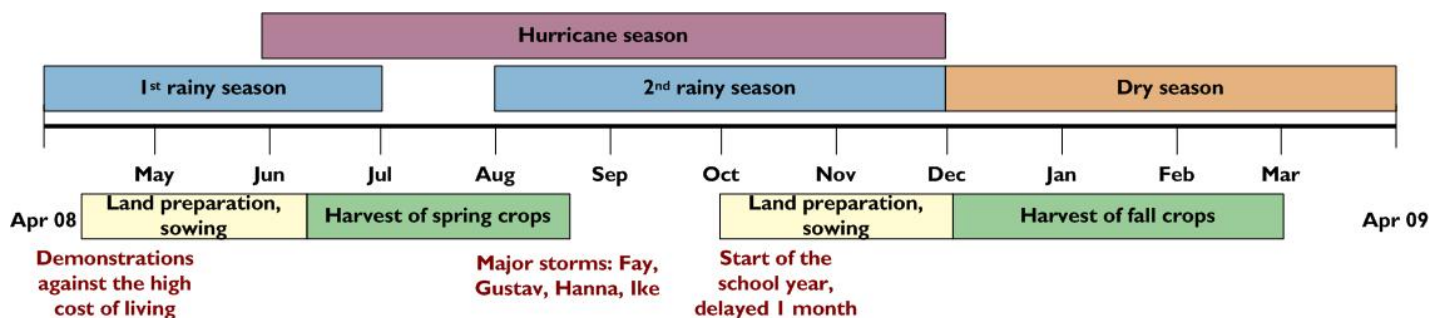
- The 2008 hurricane season (June 1 – November 30) is over. The number and frequency of major storms should fall off sharply until the next hurricane season in 2009. This year’s tropical storms and hurricanes were extremely destructive, claiming more than a thousand lives in yet another illustration of Haiti’s extreme vulnerability to weather hazards. Their impact on watersheds and natural resources has caused further environmental degradation.
- Harvests of rainy season crops have just begun and should continue through February 2009. According to forecasts by the CNSA (the Office of the National Food Security Coordinator) and FEWS NET, harvests across the country are expected to be about average. Only a very good harvest could significantly improve food security conditions. In general, staple food prices have declined significantly, though they are still running very high. However, prices in certain areas such as Artibonite are liable to shoot up again with the suspension of the targeted food aid and emergency response program. Thus, an estimated 3.3 million Haitians living mainly in poor urban areas, in the country’s Northwestern and Artibonite departments and on the Southern peninsula are still classified as food insecure (Figure 1). Areas at high-risk of a major food crisis scattered all across the country, but are found particularly in mountainous regions (Figure 2). Approximately 210,000 people living in these vulnerable areas likely to require emergency aid.
- There are numerous well-targeted but rather poorly coordinated emergency response programs currently in progress. The Flash Appeal has so far failed to raise sufficient funding. These operations cannot continue without a new infusion of funds.

Figure 1. Current food security assessment for November 2008, by municipality



Source: CNSA/FEWS NET Haiti
Click on www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale for more information on the FEWS NET food insecurity severity scale.

Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline



This report was made possible by assistance from the following organizations:



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The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the organizations assisting the CNSA (the European Union, FAO, WFP) and FEWS NET (USAID).

Current food security conditions

Harvests of 2008 rainy season crops have just begun and should continue into February 2009, except in the North and other small agro-ecological zones, where farmers have just begun planting field crops. According to liaison officers from MARNDR (the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development), harvest forecasts for major seasonal crops (beans, corn, sorghum, pigeon peas, roots, and tubers) are running approximately 20 percent below figures for the 2007 rainy season harvest, which was considered to be a good harvest for the country as a whole. This production shortfall is significant and could further curtail food availability and access over the next six months. In fact, only a very good harvest could reverse current trends in food insecurity levels. In any event, right now, food availability is still good and, though still running very high, food prices have declined sharply.

There could be a sudden, severe spate of food crises, particularly in remote areas where monitoring activities are inadequate, as in the case of Baie d'Oranges in the municipality of Belle Anse in the Southeast (see the October 2008 Food Security Update). Liaison officers have pinpointed pockets of food insecurity and areas at risk of being engulfed in more severe food crises, with high rates of severe child malnutrition. These areas lie in municipal districts in severely eroded regions of the country at high elevations, concentrated in Nippes, the Southeastern, the Western, the Central, the Northeastern and the Northwestern departments (see Figure 2). The farming systems in these parts of the country are not very diversified, severely limiting sources of income in these areas. Moreover, these are all remote areas with poor access to basic health or water supply services.

Ongoing disaster response programs, such as labor-intensive public works projects (particularly clean-up operations in cities, erosion control programs, etc.) are helping to bolster the incomes of poor households in these areas, though still falling short of meeting actual needs. Private contractors across the country are engaged in numerous projects repairing irrigation systems and stabilizing ravines or river banks financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Rural Development (MARNDR). FAO, MARNDR, and various NGOs are distributing seeds and farm implements, and WFP and various other organizations are distributing food and non-food aid kits. The MARNDR and FAO are planning to mount a USD 10 million short-term food production program. However, current needs are so great that these programs are deemed inadequate, both in the short term and, even more so, for the long term. As a result, the CNSA and FEWS NET are still classifying an estimated 3.3 million Haitians as moderately to extremely food-insecure. Though scattered across all parts of the country, this food-insecure population is concentrated mainly in the Northwestern, Artibonite, Southeastern, Nippes, Southern and Grand' Anse departments (Figure 1).

Assessment of storm damage from the 2008 hurricane season

NOAA experts had predicted that the 2008 hurricane season (June 1 – November 30) in the North Atlantic zone, which includes Haiti, would be much more active than usual. With 16 named hurricanes, 6 of them classified as major storms, it did in fact turn out to be one of the most active hurricane seasons in the last fifty years. This year's hurricanes are regarded as the most destructive storms in history after Hurricanes Rita and, in particular, Katrina, dating back to 2005. In fact, Haiti was hit by four tropical storms and hurricanes (Fay, Gustav, Hanna, and Ike) in a single month's time, between mid-August and mid-September. With more than 1,000 human fatalities, over 10,000 homes destroyed, a dozen or so bridges washed away, thousands of hectares of crops damaged, and tens of thousands of animals lost, the effects of these storms were devastating. This was the most damage suffered by Haiti in thirty years, with the possible exception of the damage caused by Hurricane Jeanne in 2004 which, single-handedly, claimed roughly 2,000 human lives in the city of Gonaïves.

A joint assessment by the government, NGOs, and donor-funded projects coordinated by the CNSA estimated the extent of the damage caused by this year's August and September storms to the nation's agricultural sector at USD 229 million, most of which was in the form of flood damage. Artibonite Department, which includes the city of Gonaïves, suffered the most damage by far, with crop losses valued at approximately USD 95 million, accounting for 41 percent of all reported storm damage (Figure 3), followed by the Southeastern (12 percent), Southern (9 percent), Western (8 percent), Northern (7 percent) and Nippes (7 percent) departments. Vegetable crops, animal production, and farm infrastructure in the three hardest hit departments (Artibonite, the Southeastern, and the Southern departments) suffered the most damage. Animal production operations in the Western Department, the fourth hardest hit department (particularly in the municipalities of Cabaret and Arcahaïe), suffered the most damage (valued at USD 8 million), followed by vegetable crops (with USD 6 million in losses), and infrastructure (with USD 5 million worth of damage).

Soil erosion and losses of land along rivers

Even normal amounts of precipitation cause slow but steady water erosion, which washes away a thin layer of arable topsoil, particularly in the absence of adequate plant cover and erosion control measures. This erosion is responsible for a gradual loss of fertility. Torrential rains such as those associated with this year’s August and September storms significantly speed up the rate of erosion, cause landslides, enlarge existing gullies and ravines, and hollow out new ravines. They also cause rivers to overflow their banks, flooding surrounding areas. These losses of arable topsoil were not taken into account in the damage assessment due to a number of technical problems. Nevertheless, such losses are substantial, judging, for example, by the estimated ten million cubic meters of mud removed from the city of Gonaïves alone.

Nor did the damage assessment include losses of cropland along the banks of rivers. These losses of land, which are especially severe in Artibonite and Nippes Departments (Table 1), have made it impossible for the country to continue to produce especially lucrative crops such as fruit (bananas and mangos, in particular) and vegetable crops. A tentative estimate of the total extent of these losses of land along rivers by MARNDR liaison officers puts the total area at 4,178 hectares. The price of a hectare of cropland varies widely from one part of the country to another, ranging from a low of USD 12,500 in Grand’ Anse, to as high as USD 60,000 per hectare in Arcahaie, in the West. At an average price of USD 10,000/hectare, the value of irreparable losses of cropland would come to approximately USD 40 million.

Table 1. Losses of land along rivers (ha)

| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| North | 29 |
| Northwest | 14 |
| Northeast | 10 |
| Artibonite | 1,000 |
| Center | 600 |
| West | 100 |
| Nippes | 1,000 |
| Southeast | 680 |
| South | 135 |
| Grand’ Anse | 610 |
| Total | 4,178 |

Source: Estimate by MARNDR/CNSA liaison officers

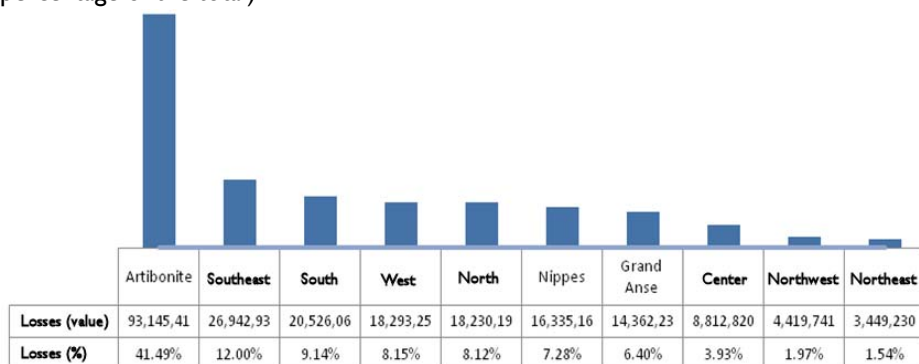
A number of interventions designed to prevent these types of losses are already in progress, including soil conservation works on hillsides and river bank protection projects in floodplain areas. The government is currently engaged in these types of works in practically all parts of the country, in many cases, through specialized service providers, using emergency funding granted to the MARNDR. Virtually all municipalities have already planned or are in the process of mounting agricultural projects. United Nations organizations (such as the International Organization for Migration-IOM, with USAID financing), NGOs, and existing MARNDR projects are busy performing similar types of works, funded by the donor community. The expansion and extension of these types of works, together with reforestation projects and refinements in good farming practices by individual farmers, could help better control massive erosion and landslides in the medium and long term. These works need to be stepped up and coordinated, particularly at the watershed level.

Harvest outlook for 2008 rainy season crops

To begin with, according to the CNSA, the country’s total food supply per the 2007 food balance sheet was met by commercial imports (48 percent), domestic production (47 percent), and food aid (5 percent).

Harvest forecasts are based on qualitative data in the absence of recent quantitative estimates serving as a frame of reference, particularly at the departmental level. Nor are there any animal production forecasts for lack of adequate data, despite the fact that livestock-raising is an important source of income and an important factor in food access. According to the WFP/CNSA food security and vulnerability assessment dating back to November 2007, livestock-raising activities account for approximately 9 percent of the income earned by rural households nationwide.

Figure 3: Breakdown of total crop losses by department (in USD and as a percentage of the total)



Source: CNSA, based on data furnished by different front-line partners

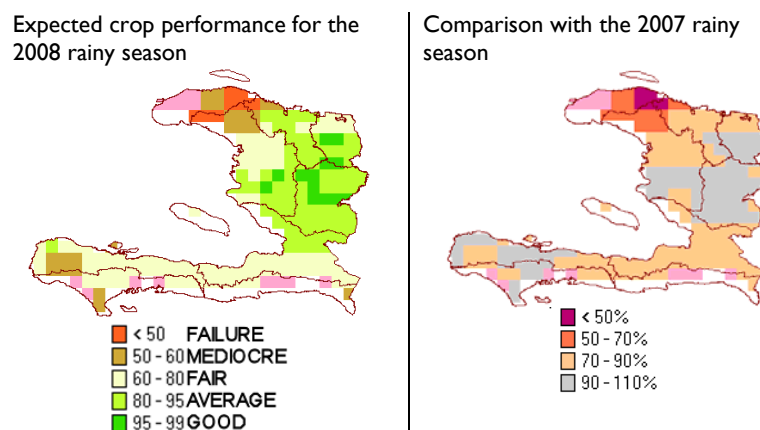
Harvests of 2008 rainy season crops, which got underway in late November, should pick up speed between December and February. In quantitative terms, this harvest is expected to account for approximately 75-80 percent of the country's total food supply and 50 percent of its grain supplies in the first half of 2009, until the next major harvest scheduled for July of 2009.

Crop performance for this growing season, compared with the 2007 and 2006 rainy seasons, will depend on the following major factors: (1) the tropical storms and hurricanes striking the country in August and September; (2) the rainfall deficits reported in certain parts of the country such as the Northwest and the Northeast; and (3) the availability of agricultural inputs. The use of chemical fertilizer is way up from the last two seasons, thanks to government subsidies. However much of this fertilizer was washed away by water, particularly in the Artibonite Valley, whose farmers used the largest quantity of fertilizer.

MARNDR liaison officers are reporting that domestic crop performance for all major crops

(corn, beans, pigeon peas, and sorghum) will be down approximately 20 percent from last year and 30 percent from 2006. By way of comparison, the 2007 rainy season was rated as good and the 2006 season as very good. Bean crops are showing the largest decline in yields from last year (approximately 25 percent nationwide and 50 percent in the Southern Department). Corn yields are the least affected (down by only approximately 10 percent nationwide and by 30 percent in Artibonite Department). The figures on corn yields supplied by MARNDR liaison officers (and, by extension, on corn production, since there was no significant change in the size of the area planted in this crop) are comparable to satellite estimates based on the water requirement satisfaction index for this crop (Figure 4). According to the satellite model, corn yields for this season in the Central Department and parts of the Southern peninsula should be more or less the same as last year. This year, the model is not particularly useful in the latter area, since it is based on water deficits at different stages of crop growth and development and does not take the recent hurricanes and flooding into account.

Figure 4. Satellite estimate of the water requirement satisfaction index for corn crops as of the second dekad of November 2008



Source: USGS/FEWS NET

Markets and staple food prices

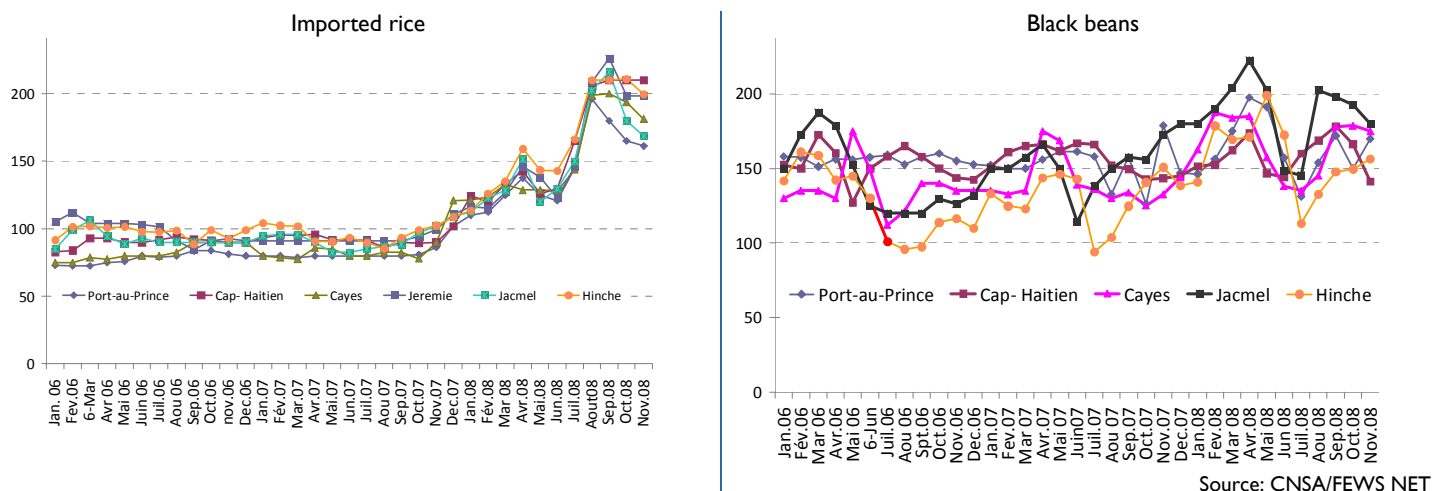
Emergency public works programs mounted by the government and its various partners have restored access to areas isolated by the storms and by ensuing landslides, floods, or bridge collapses. However, secondary and tertiary roads and service roads in irrigated areas, which were generally already in poor condition even before the storms, are still in extremely bad shape, particularly in Nippes, Grand Anse and the Northwestern departments.

As of November 2008, there is generally relatively good access to food in all parts of the country and a relatively smooth flow of crops from areas producing marketable surpluses to consumption areas, restoring good regional market integration. In practice, market integration causes prices to generally move in the same direction, either upwards or downwards, in some cases, with a small time lag. This phenomenon is illustrated in Figure 5 with respect to imported rice and black beans. These same graphs also show the poor market integration as of August due to impassible roads disrupting the smooth flow of trade in these crops between different markets. Though their markets are also relatively well integrated, price differentials for beans are larger than for rice, most likely, due to the large variety of different types of beans.

In general, the downswing in staple food prices reported in October continued into November. Thus, the same five pound sack of imported rice selling for 210 gourdes in mid-September in Jacmel, at the height of the storms, was selling for 150 gourdes in late November. Food availability from food aid is cited as the main reason for this downturn in prices. Other contributing factors are the decline in international market prices, the upcoming harvest of rainy season crops (improving general food availability) and falling fuel prices. According to analysts, international market prices for major crops (wheat, corn, and rice) are expected to

continue falling in the short term, eventually leveling off at relatively high levels over the medium and long term due to the growing demand from emerging markets (for meat production) and the use of corn for ethanol production.

Figure 5. Trends in food prices on regional markets between January 2006 and November 2008 (in gourdes per 6 lb sack)



Source: CNSA/FEWS NET

Recommendations

As in previous months, our recommendations for the immediate future and the short term (up to one year) are as follows:

The government should: (1) continue to finance emergency programs while, at the same time, devising strategies and raising needed funding to reduce the country’s vulnerability and build community resilience; (2) develop social safety net programs including services, such as school lunches and community health services targeted primarily at pregnant women, nursing mothers, and children under 2 years of age; and (3) play a more proactive role in the establishment of coordination mechanisms and in the effective coordination of emergency response and development programs at the country-wide and departmental levels.

The donor community should: (1) come up with the remaining funding sought by the emergency appeal; (2) furnish technical and financial assistance in support of long-term strategies and programs for reducing vulnerability and building community resilience.

The various implementing agencies (specialized United Nations organizations, NGOs, projects, etc.) should: (1) continue to provide food aid, which needs to be well targeted and reach more members of vulnerable population groups to better serve high-risk groups; (2) continue working to improve sanitary conditions in major disaster areas and to repair water supply and irrigation systems using labor-intensive methods as much as possible; (3) help recapitalize farm units, specifically by helping farmers rebuild their livestock herds, granting loans and/or facilitating access to credit, particularly to women; (4) assist fishermen in coastal areas with new fishing gear and tackle, in particular; and (5) specifically in areas considered to be on the verge of a serious food insecurity crisis, help monitor trends, (through ad hoc monitoring activities, nutrition watches, or early warning alerts with bulletins issued every two weeks, for example), assist with assessments of humanitarian needs and, where applicable, provide necessary emergency food and non-food aid.

This report was written in conjunction with:

