

Summary

The 2000/2001-crop production season is well underway in Niger. Heavy to moderate rain fell in the south, central and eastern part of the country during the first ten days (first decade) of July, leading farmers to step up their planting throughout most agricultural areas of the country. The Ministry of Rural Development reported that, as of the first ten days of July, about 82 percent of the agricultural villages nationwide had planted their crops, compared to 64 percent at the end of June and 57 percent at the same time last year. As little time remains to plant rainfed crops, the quality of rainfall in the second decade of July (11-20) will be a critical factor for the remaining agricultural villages that have not yet planted.

While plant diseases and pests remain in control for now, more than 11,000 hectares are threatened by grasshoppers in Diffa, Zinder and Maradi Departments.

Cereal prices remained stable in most markets as of early July this year compared to June but are higher than prices prevailing in July last year.

Rainfall

During the first decade of July rainfall was moderate to heavy and well timed over the agricultural parts of Niger. Most of the south, central and western parts of the country received between 25 to 50 mm over this period and some stations in Maradi and Dosso departments received over 50 mm in one day. In contrast, the departments of Diffa, Agadez and the northern part of Tillabéry received only light rains. In the agricultural zone, vegetation coverage has increased significantly but remains patchy in the pastoral areas.

Cumulative rainfall as of July 10 exceeds rainfall received in 1999 in about two-thirds of the rainfall stations. However, rainfall is below long-term normal in about half of the stations.

Agricultural Situation

Nigerien farmers may successfully plant rainfed crops from about May 12 to July 26, depending on the *arrondissement*, going from south to north, and the timing of the start of the rains. As a result of recent rainfall, seasonal planting increased significantly during the first decade of July compared to the last decade of June and at the same time last year. Nationally, about 82 percent (8,261 of 10,074) of Niger's agricultural villages had sowed their fields, compared to 64 percent at the end of June and 57 percent by the end of the first decade of July last year. The main exception is the Department of Agadez where rains — and sowing — are late compared to last year. The volume and distribution of rainfall in the second decade of July will be a critical

factor for planting in the remaining agricultural villages and for replanting in areas that have experienced drought, pest attacks and dust winds.

In general, farmers planted earlier this year compared to last. However, pockets of drought, water stress and dust winds that could destroy young plants were reported in Diffa, Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder departments that, in some cases, requiring replanting. As rainfall ends in mid-September in Niger, a successful harvest requires ample, well timed rains between mid-May to the end of September.

Each department faces one or more insect pests this season. The most potentially threatening are grasshoppers, now spread across more than 11,000 hectares. These grasshoppers have already caused crop damage in Zinder, Maradi and Diffa departments. Local spraying by truck is underway but as more eggs hatch over the next few weeks, spraying by air may be required over a wider area. Other threats include rodents in Diffa and Maradi departments, plant lice in Agadez, and Senegalese grasshoppers observed in Diffa department.

Livestock Situation

Livestock conditions improved during early July and overall animal health is good as the rainy season advances. Now that most of the fields previously used for grazing are under cultivation in the agricultural zone, there are seasonal shortages of pasture and fodder — millet and sorghum stalks, millet and sorghum bran and cowpea stalks and leaves. This shortage is becoming critical in Diffa Department in the pastoral zone where more animals are concentrated.

Cereals Markets

According to the national Market Information System (SIM), cereal prices in 31 markets as of July 11 remained the same compared to prices in June. Millet prices varied from a low of 104 FCFA/kg in Bakin Birgi (Zinder) to a high of 123 FCFA/kg in Dioundiou (Dosso). Cereal prices in July 2000 are somewhat higher than prices in July 1999, ranging from 5 percent higher in Filingue to 33 percent higher in Maradi. However, prices this year is about 43 percent lower, on average, than in July 1998 and 28 percent lower than in 1997 (see Figure 1).

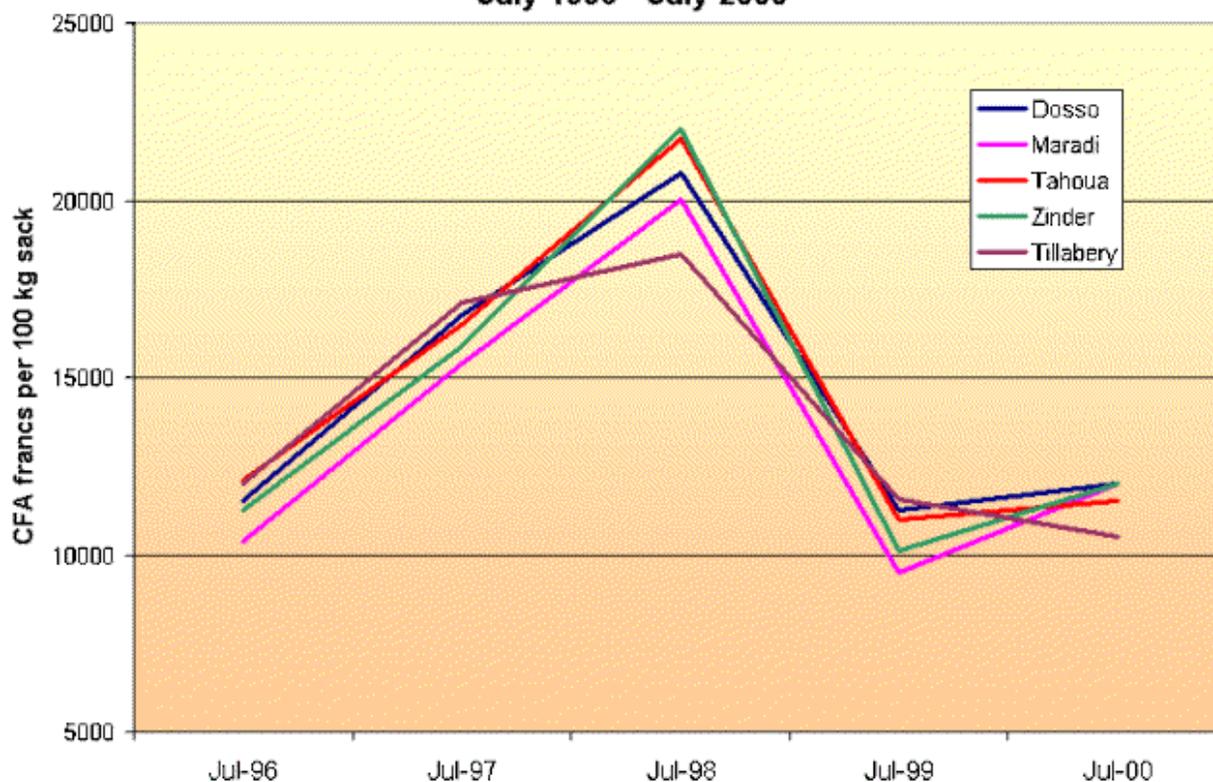
Lower livestock prices were reported in the arrondissements of Ouallam, Tillabery and Filingue which, when combined with high cereal prices, resulted in lower terms of trade — volume of cereals per animal — for pastoralists.

Contingency and Response-Planning

As a result of two consecutive years of good production, there is little contingency or response planning underway in Niger. Even though there are no appeals for emergency food aid currently, the government has asked donors for program food assistance for use in subsidized sales and mitigation and rehabilitation projects in areas of deficit cereal production. However, most donors are working on their poverty reduction programs, which include food security, and have not responded directly to the government's requests.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) has financed 13 food-for-work projects in six arrondissements (Ouallam, Matameye, Maine, N'Guigmi, Diffa and Zinder City). The National Early Warning System (SAP) Management Committee (GC) has provided 255 MT of millet to the arrondissement Food Security Committees in Tera, Tillabery, Illela, Guidan Roudji and Diffa to manage labour-intensive public works programs there. The major tasks of these Food Security Committees are to monitor socioeconomic indicators and manage local food security interventions.

Figure. 1
Wholesale Millet Prices in Departmental Capitals, Niger
July 1996 - July 2000



Vulnerability Updates

Farm Households

The *soudure* or hungry period (May – August) is a time of seasonal food insecurity in Niger, a normal occurrence. May marks the end of the off-season gardening in areas where there is sufficient water. The collection and consumption of wild foods and temporary migration also increase during the hungry period.

Even with successively good harvests that have boosted food security levels in the agricultural and many pastoral areas in Niger the last two years, the SAP has reported an increase in indicators of possible food insecurity in most departments, based on conditions in May, in its July bulletin. These indicators include a reduction in the number

of daily meals; increasing collection and consumption of “famine” foods,” increasing malnutrition of children under five years, inadequate farm household food stocks, and unusual migration of some families. The SAP recommends that food security assessments be carried out in these areas to determine the exact magnitude of these problems.