Though stable, drought-induced high prices keep many parts of the country in IPC Phase 2 (stressed).

- Most parts of the North, including the upper Artibonite and the Northwest, have experienced drought since last November. If this continues, it will undermine the food security of local residents. Household reserves in certain municipalities in the Northwest, the upper Artibonite, and the Northeast are already running low. Poor households in these areas are in IPC Phase 2 (stressed).

- Food prices in general and grain prices in particular have been stable since December. This pattern is likely to continue in the face of trends on the world market, where the price of rice is falling. On the other hand, bean prices in most parts of the country are increasing and are expected to continue to climb until the upcoming harvest in May.

- The main spring growing season has already started in certain parts of the country such as the Southeast and Nippes, where many farmers have planted corn and bean crops.

**Updated food security outlook through June 2012**

All scheduled harvests of grains and legumes for the first quarter of this year are nearly complete and, in most parts of the country, are near-average. Ongoing harvests of vegetable crops in irrigated areas, particularly in the Artibonite Valley, on the St. Raphael Plain, and in certain areas of the Western and Southeastern Departments with market gardening activities, are also average.

The second main rice harvest in the Artibonite is scheduled to begin in April but, with rice farmers able to access only half the amount of fertilizer required for proper crop growth and development, is expected to be below-average. Small-scale rice growers forced to plant smaller than usual areas in crops or to apply less fertilizer will have lower purchasing power for the entire second quarter of the year. The extremely high cost of producing local rice prevents it from being able to compete with lower-priced rice imports.

The main spring growing season will start with the first rains in March/April. Rainfall levels as of the beginning of March were below historical averages, creating persistent water shortages in nearly all parts of the North. A lag of roughly two months in the beginning of the rains last spring delayed the planting of crops and extended the lean season in nearly all parts of the North. This year, there are already reports of lags in rainfall activity in the Northeast, the Northwest, and many municipalities in the Northern department are experiencing severe drought. Lack of water has prevented the planting of corn, cowpea, and rice crops. If this continues, scheduled May and June harvests of cowpeas and bananas will not take place, with disastrous effects on household purchasing power.

Increased rainfall activity in March helped ease the abnormally dry conditions in the West and on the southern peninsula.
Weather forecasts by the NOAA call for average and above-average rainfall in the early part of April in the West and on the southern peninsula. According to the IRI, there is an equal likelihood of average, below-average, and above-average rainfall in all parts of the country for the three-month period between April and June.

April marks the beginning of the lean season, which will run through June. Certain parts of the country such as the far Northwest and certain pockets across the Northeast with below-average winter harvests began the lean season as early as March. Traditional survival mechanisms have already been activated or will be set in motion during the course of April. Examples include labor migration to other parts of the country or abroad, charcoal production, and borrowing at high interest rates. Increasingly, youth are turning to new survival strategies such as driving motorbike taxis or selling telephone calling cards. There will be increasing pressure on timber resources during this period, particularly in the Northwest, not only as a source of cash for buying food, but also for purchasing needed supplies of farm inputs for the spring growing season.

According to certain indexes, there should not be any large fluctuations in market prices during the entire lean season. Prices on most markets across the country have been more or less stable since December. Prices for rice, the staple of the Haitian diet, are falling on the world market. Prices for other grains like corn and wheat are relatively stable. February prices for imported rice on all domestic markets were down from December and from the same time last year. The price of a six-pound sack of rice on the Cap-Haitien market, for example, went from 132 gourdes in February 2011 to 120 gourdes in December 2011, down to 108 gourdes in February 2012, a 22 percent drop from February of last year. Prices on other markets across the country have been stable since January.

The only upward trends in prices are associated with sales of legumes on the Cap-Haitien, Jérémie, and Hinche markets, which are largely a result of the poor bean harvests in certain parts of the country and increased demand with the start-up of the spring growing season. A large part of the February/March bean harvest will be used for seeds in wet mountain areas in March and April. In Hinche, for example, a six pound sack of beans was selling for 175 gourdes in February, compared with 166 gourdes this past December, which is a five percent increase. However, prices are expected to drop in May and June after the spring bean harvest. Nevertheless, certain factors such as a rise in fuel prices at the pump or in the exchange rate for the U.S. dollar vis-à-vis the gourde could affect food prices.

For the past two years or so, the beginning of the rainy season has not only triggered widespread farming activities in rural areas, but has sparked new fears of a spreading cholera epidemic. Cholera rates fell off sharply during the dry season and, according to the Ministry of Public Health, in the last few weeks, there have been less than 100 new reported cases a day anywhere in the country.

The fall and winter harvests helped improve food availability in all parts of the country, contributing to job creation in rural areas. The country’s main spring growing season will create more new jobs, while it lasts. These activities should help poor households and farm workers with depleted food reserves sustain their food access during the upcoming lean season. Farm laborers in all parts of the country earn between 100 and 150 gourdes per day, or 50 to 75 percent of the minimum wage for workers in the manufacturing industry, which employs 30,000 workers at most and has cut close to 3,000 jobs in the last six months with the slowdown in the U.S. economy.

Households in areas hard hit by the drought responsible for recent large production shortfalls or crop losses will have a hard time meeting their energy requirements. This is especially true in the case of the northwest peninsula and certain municipalities in the upper Artibonite. Residents of other pockets across the Northeast, the North, the Southeast, and the Central Plateau could find themselves in the same situation for the entire lean season, between March/April and June. The hundreds of thousands of IDPs living in camps and shantytowns In the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area are facing a similar situation. These populations could find themselves in Phase 2 (stressed) of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) scale.

Port-au-Prince metropolitan area
The rainy season is already underway in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area. Torrential rains are leaving certain parts of the city in standing water. The worst-off households are those living in tents in camps and shantytowns, where tents are no longer sheltering them from the rain and runoff. This could undermine health conditions, just when most of the humanitarian agencies which had been providing them with aid have left the area. Though stable, for the most part, food prices are still at last year’s levels for this time of year, while the price of certain crops like black beans has gone from 150 up to 160 gourdes. The cash-for-work programs allowing workers from poor households to earn as much as 200 gourdes a
day last year have been scaled back considerably. Very poor and poor households could be facing a decrease in purchasing power.

**Upper Artibonite**
The rainy season has still not gotten underway in this part of the country, which has been in the throes of a drought since last November. The worst-off municipalities are Terre Neuve, Anse-Rouge, Gros Morne, and St Michel. The dry winds sweeping through the area in February and March only aggravated the problem, particularly in Gros-Morne and Anse-Rouge, causing mango trees in Gros Morne to lose their flowers and threatening the mango harvest, a mainstay of the local economy of this area, which is a major producer of mango crops earmarked for export. The windy conditions in Anse-Rouge created rough seas, preventing fishermen from going out to fish. Pastoralists in dry areas are facing a shortage of pasture. Looking to prevent future losses of livestock due to starvation, certain pastoralists are thinning their herds by selling off goats or cattle, causing prices to inch downward by an average of five percent. The beginning of the rains in April/May should help improve conditions in these areas. Sorghum harvests in dry areas like Anse-Rouge, dry Gonaïves plain areas, Gros Morne, and Terre-Neuve have been poor. However, irrigated plain areas such as the Gonaïves plain had a good bean harvest in March. The lean season is already underway in dry areas, where harvests have been rather poor. Poor households in these areas are in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) as a result of the decline in food availability with the loss of winter crops. The drought is affecting local livelihoods. Humanitarian organizations in the municipalities of Terre-Neuve, Anse-Rouge, and Saint-Michel are trying to ease conditions through the mounting of cash-for-work programs, which are also helping the poorest households. Some 2,000 residents of each municipality will be employed by these programs between February and August, earning 200 gourdes a day, with each work crew doing a one-month rotation. There will be breaks to allow for the completion of farming activities. Participation in these programs will not only help beneficiaries improve their nutritional situation, but will also enable them to prepare for the spring growing season.

**Northwest**
Certain villages in the far western reaches of the Northwest region are reporting extremely poor or no winter harvests of mostly sorghum, pigeon pea, and bean crops due to the severe drought in this part of the country since last September. This year’s lean season began as early as February, marked by high though stable food prices. The food aid previously available to households in this part of the country has been discontinued since agencies pulled out from the Northwest in 2007-2008. However, there are ongoing school meal programs in 170 of the region’s 400 schools. Reliance on customary survival mechanisms, particularly charcoal production, is increasing. Poor households will be in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) until the next round of harvests in July and, in most cases, will be forced to dispose of certain productive assets like wood and livestock.

**Seasonal calendar and timeline of critical events**

![Seasonal calendar and timeline of critical events](image)

Source: FEWS NET