

GUATEMALA Food Security Outlook

February to June 2012

Food security is beginning to deteriorate on a seasonal basis

Key Messages

- In the east, the highlands and the south, households will resort to purchases beginning in April, one month early, due to the reduction of harvests last year, as a consequence of losses caused by climatic events.
- In the highlands as well as the east, most poor households have sufficient stocks to last through April and can use the income from daily wages to meet their minimum food requirements through the first six months of the year, even though gradual deterioration will be seen as the months pass. This does not mean that food will be ideal in quantity or quality. However, according to the IPC classification, acute food insecurity will not occur (Phase 1). It is important to mention that even though it is classified in this phase, actions focused on improving the food security conditions of the population will be necessary to avoid future crises.

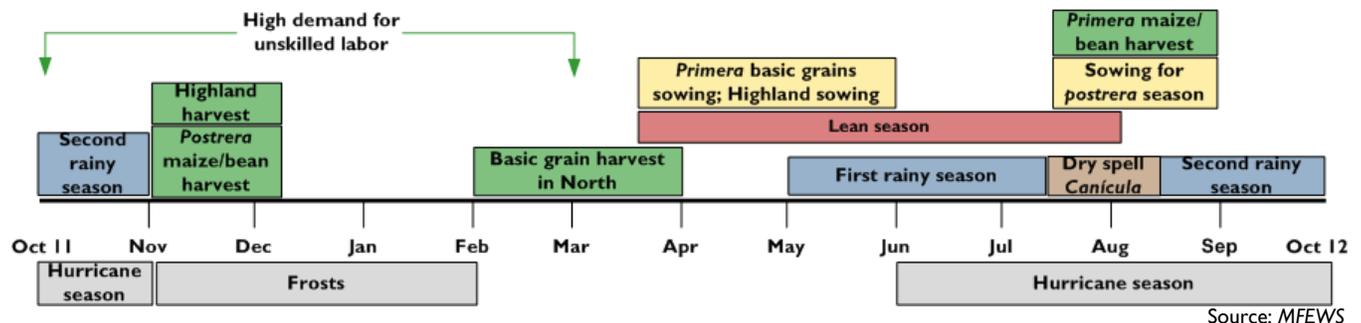
Figure 1. Most likely outcomes of acute food insecurity, February-March 2012



For more information on the IPC Food Insecurity Phases, please see: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

- For the rest of the country, seasonal deterioration of the food security situation of the poorest households also is expected, but it is expected that they will not show acute food insecurity according to the IPC categorization (Phase 1).

Seasonal Calendar and Critical Events



Most Likely Food Security Scenario (February-June 2012)

Despite the impact of the 12-E Tropical Depression and consequent low pressure systems, the food security situation improved at the end of last year with the start of the annual season of high demand for unqualified labor and the end of the harvest in the highlands and the last harvest. However, starting now, the availability of sources of employment is beginning its seasonal decline, as are basic grain reserves in the poorest households. With the end of the harvests in the north and south (low irrigation), it is predicted that corn and bean prices will drop on national markets. In addition, the flow of grain from Mexico has not changed significantly despite the losses reported in 2011. However, as we come closer to June, they will increase due to the end of the production cycle nationwide.

According to monitoring by FAO, the daily average wage in various parts of the country varies between Q41/day if they receive food, and Q52/day, without food. If a household of six people is able to work 40 days in the month, they receive 2080 Quetzales, 370 less than the cost of the daily basic food basket defined by the government. The regular income of the poorest in the country's population does not cover the basic food basket, affecting their access to food if they do not intensify their search for income. With an increase in food demand in the markets for one month, inflation of consumer products estimated at six percent between 2011 and 2012, and stable day labor rates, this means a loss of purchasing power of almost 15 percent over the year.

With the entry of the new governmental authorities, a part of the road infrastructure that was seriously affected by the strong rainy season in 2011 is being repaired, which improves access to and from markets. However, there are still roads, especially secondary roads and bridges, that need repair or construction.

Among the new initiatives promoted by the new government is the Thousand Days Program, which seeks to cover 702,251 families with interventions focused on reducing malnutrition between conception and two years of age.

Meteorological models indicate that the La Niña phenomenon will continue until April, and then will become neutral. Even though conditions will be neutral at the beginning of the rainy season in April, the start of season will be influenced by La Niña, causing the rains to come approximately two weeks earlier than usual, with subsequent irregularities between April and May. The irregularities at the beginning of the season might cause localized seed-germination problems. If this information does not reach farmers, they might incur losses that would require replanting and would mean a delay in the end of the harvest. Farmers in the highlands are the first to plant, so their crops are more vulnerable than those in other regions of the country.

Figure 2. Most likely outcomes of acute food insecurity, April-June 2012



Highlands (living standards zone 5)

The last harvest in this area ended between November and December last year, although with outcomes lower than expected at the beginning of the productive cycle, as a consequence of the damage caused by heavy rains, especially by the 12-E tropical depression. According to the monitoring conducted by the FAO among families participating in their projects as of January 31, black bean reserves are exhausted and reserves of white corn would last for 1.9 months. This report indicates that there are households that prefer to resort to buying corn during these months, with the cash made from daily wages, and to consume the grain harvested between May and June, when the price is seasonally higher. However, FEWS NET observes that the majority of poor households in the region tend to consume their corn during the next few months, which means that in early April they will depend entirely on purchases! The annual lean period will start one month early.

Although corn prices in this region remained stable in January and early February, they are still approximately 10 percent higher than last year, and also higher than the historical average and prior years. In the case of beans, they are being obtained completely by purchases due to the losses in the 2011 harvest. Although the current price is lower than the price reported in February 2011, in early February the current price showed an increase of 5 percent in comparison to the previous month. The price of corn and beans is expected to drop in the next two months due to the end of the harvest in the north of the country, and then to increase seasonally until the end of the first harvest in August or September.

The high season of labor demand is about to end with the completion of the sugarcane harvest and coffee picking. Between 45 and 60 percent of the poorest socioeconomic groups in livelihood zone 5 depend on agricultural daily wages to obtain income, therefore their access to food will be difficult from now until October with the beginning of the new coffee production cycle.

In response, the poorest households in this region will resort to their typical strategies, including national and regional

migration and the sale of domestic animals, but one month early. In addition, there are various governmental and non-governmental initiatives that will be focused on this area that will help to improve the situation of the households. The prioritization criteria were refined for these initiatives, seeking to assist families with children under two and/or pregnant women, unlike targeting in previous years, when the economic status was the criterion applied. In addition, actions more focused on improving nutrition and the health status, such as the distribution of fortified food with better nutritional value than the food delivered in the previous program, will be included. Although complete implementation of the interventions will take time, cities in the Huehuetenango department have been prioritized. It is expected that these interventions will start in the next few months and that there will be a considerable improvement in the food security scenario.

Thus, until March, it is predicted that the poorest households in the region will meet their food requirements partly through purchases, which will be possible due to income from the sale of unqualified labor. In the second quarter of the year, the majority of extremely poor households are classified as IPC Phase 1. Though they will resort to “security” response strategies, these are reversible and do not erode their livelihood. There are households in which the extent of the problem is not sufficient to classify in the next IPC phases, although they will have food security problems. These households require permanent actions focused on improving their situation to avoid a future crisis.

East (especially living standards zones 7 and 8¹, which include the departments of El Progreso, Santa Rosa, Chiquimula, Zacapa, Jalapa and Jutiapa)

The damage to the harvests last year was less than that experienced in the west and south of the country. However, according to FAO reports, corn reserves in households in this region will last for 1.8 months. Bean reserves will last for 1.3 months, 60 percent less than what they reported in the same month during 2010. Last year, due to agricultural losses, they had no stocks in January. Households in this region now have cash available from the daily labor wages from the sugarcane harvest, coffee picking, and the harvest of tobacco and melon, among other products. They use this income to buy food, in order to consume their reserves later. On account of this, it is expected that the annual lean season will start between April and May, slightly earlier than normal. This early start is for the third consecutive year in the region.

In response to food availability and access challenges, the poorest households in this region will resort to selling their few domestic animals (chickens) to obtain cash, as well as reducing the number of meals. In addition, migration to other sectors of production, such as Mexico and the capital city will increase. Despite these strategies, it is expected that until April, the poorest households in the region will be in Phase 1 (see Figure 2), because they have some basic grains and cash for purchases. It is important to keep in mind that their diet is only barely sufficient and is not of consistent quality. Conditions will begin to deteriorate as the second quarter passes, but they are not expected to enter a phase of stress or crisis, according to the IPC classification.

Table I: Less likely events over the next six months that might change the scenarios above

Area	Event	Impact on food security outcomes
Nationwide, especially the highlands	The interventions proposed in the new governmental plans and programs are not completely implemented over the next six months	Because the population will not receive any assistance outside of that from previous years, and because it is expected that the lean season will begin early, households might resort to response strategies that erode their livelihoods. Some areas could then be in IPC Phase 2: Stress.
Nationwide	The beginning of the rainy season occurs normally	A normal start of season would allow crops to develop adequately, especially corn and beans, with an average yield and typical harvest times. Therefore, the annual lean period would end normally and food reserves in households would allow less dependence on purchases in the second six months of the year and in 2013.

¹ Livelihoods: http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/gt_profile_es.pdf.