

## HAITI Food Security Outlook Update

February 2011

### High prices and cholera affecting food security

#### Key Messages

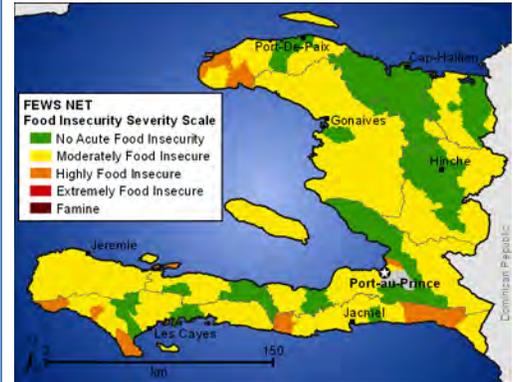
- The cholera outbreak has been on the decline since January. According to the Ministry of Public Health and Population, the 515 hospitalizations a day up until January 16<sup>th</sup> were down to 377 as of January 30<sup>th</sup>. However, there is still a shortage of farm workers in rice-growing areas of the Artibonite due to fears of catching cholera.
- The announcement of the final results of the November 28<sup>th</sup> elections at the beginning of February failed to quell the political crisis, which is being ramped up by violent demonstrations and acts of crime, particularly in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area. This crisis will increase the financial cost of doing business in the Port-au-Prince area between March and May.
- The steady rise in food prices since last September accelerated in January. This trend will continue, due largely to higher world market prices approaching 2008 price levels. Prices will stay very high between March and May, amplified by the political crisis and the effects of the cholera outbreak. Very poor and poor households in areas especially hard hit by the cholera epidemic (the Artibonite) Hurricane Thomas (the southern peninsula), and the earthquake of January 12<sup>th</sup> of last year (the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area) will require assistance.

#### Updated food security outlook through June 2011

The nationwide sociopolitical situation since the November 28<sup>th</sup> elections is adversely affecting food security conditions. Pursuit of the disputed election process could lead to further unrest, depriving households of their usual sources of income during the second-round runoff elections between February and March of this year. This climate of uncertainty will adversely affect the food security of poor households whose members need to work as day laborers in order to earn a living.

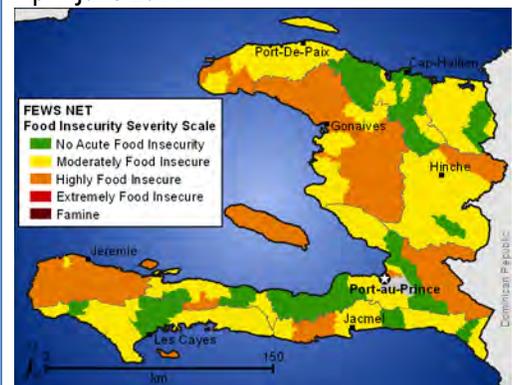
The prevalence of cholera declined between December and January. According to the Ministry of Public Health and Population, the 515 hospitalizations a day up until January 16<sup>th</sup> were down to 377 as of January 30<sup>th</sup>. Experts expect this rate to continue to decline throughout the dry season, but the beginning of the rains in April/May could trigger a new outbreak. However, with the arrangements in place and the effort made to sensitize the population to the importance of preventive measures, it is highly likely that both the prevalence rate and the fatality rate will continue to decline in all parts of the country. However, fears of contracting cholera have tightened the supply of labor and weakened demand for local crops, which will lower incomes and crop production to as much as 30 percent below-average, particularly in the case of rice and crops from the Artibonite.

**Figure 1.** Most likely food security outcomes, February-March 2011



Source: FEWS NET

**Figure 2.** Most likely food security outcomes, April-June 2011



Source: FEWS NET

For more information on FEWS NET's Food Insecurity Severity Scale, please see:  
[www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale](http://www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale)

*This report is an update of the January 2011 FEWS NET Food Security Outlook assessing food security conditions in Haiti through the end of June 2011. The next Outlook report for the period from April through September 2011 will be released in April.*

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With the exception of the southern peninsula, the Northwest, and other communities hit by Hurricane Thomas in early November of last year, most parts of the country should bring in average autumn harvests in February and March, including harvests of bean and vegetable crops in irrigated plain and wet mountain areas. Bean prices for the first week of February were down on most markets, due in part to the presence of pigeon peas from this year's larger than average harvest. However, since this crop is eaten green at harvest time and the harvest is nearly over, bean prices on most markets are expected to rise, in line with seasonal trends in the five-year average.

The seasonal rise in food prices between March and May will be steeper than usual due to the upward pressure on imports and the aforesaid problems affecting nationwide harvests.

Very poor and poor households will continue to receive aid from the international community, particularly in the form of cash-for-work activities. USAID, for example, expects to create close to 20,000 temporary jobs during the outlook period. Current assistance for cholera victims will be extended. There are water supply and sanitation projects underway in the Northwest, the Southeast, and other parts of the country. USAID/OFDA built 1,500 temporary shelters between January 6<sup>th</sup> and February 3<sup>rd</sup>, with another 500 families housed in quake-damaged homes repaired during this same period. In spite of the good pace of this work, there will be approximately 740,000 people still living in tents in June, which begins this year's hurricane season, mainly in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area. An extension of this aid throughout the entire outlook period will help give poor recipients better food access and keep the size of the food-insecure population smaller than expected.

#### **Port-au-Prince metropolitan area**

The cost of a standard so-called "livelihood basket" rose by approximately 14 percent between September and December of last year. In contrast, potential monthly income (estimated income for two wage earners for a 40-day period) rose by only around 11 percent over the same period. With these trends expected to sharpen, the month of February will be marked by a steadily increasing livelihood deficit, as projected in the outlook for January through June. Food prices will continue to rise until the upcoming harvest of spring crops.

The post-election crisis will continue into June, even after the installation of a new government, contributing to an atypical rise in food prices in the face of heightened business risks. Moreover, Haiti imports approximately half its food supply. Rising world market prices for grain in general and rice in particular will further increase prices as of the beginning of March, until at least the next round of harvests in June and July. Other factors such as the rise in international oil prices could further aggravate the situation. Rises in oil prices passed on to the consumer could also increase transportation costs and food prices.

As of March, the high cost of food will make it more difficult for very poor and poor households to meet their basic survival needs (making them highly food-insecure). The resulting deterioration in food security conditions in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area will hit poor households in camps and shantytowns especially hard.

#### **The Artibonite Valley and lower Central Plateau**

Like the rest of the country, this area, which has been hardest hit by the cholera epidemic, has been given a respite. The prevalence rate for cholera is steadily falling. However, the local population will continue to feel the effects of the cholera outbreak throughout the outlook period. The disease has hit farm workers from the Northwest and neighboring mountain areas particularly hard. Local farmers were unable to hire enough laborers to work their fields. Many were forced to curtail their farming activities, causing them to plant smaller areas in crops or to plant their crops late. Food availability during the rice harvest in April and May will be poorer than usual.

With the decline in the prevalence of cholera, consumers are beginning to resume their normal eating habits and demand crops from the Artibonite. The price of the popular variety of rice grown in the valley went from 85 gourdes in December to 100 gourdes by February. This trend should continue, with traders stocking up on rice from the valley in anticipation of a rise in price in March and April. On the other hand, prices for market garden crops are falling, as is generally the case at this time of year. However, this year, the cholera outbreak is working against these farmers. The Dominicans who normally buy their onion crops are precluded from doing so by the shutting of the border. This means a loss of potential income for farmers, many of whom are choosing to wait to harvest their crops for lack of proper conservation methods. As projected in the outlook, according to the FEWS NET food insecurity severity scale, very poor and poor households will be highly food-insecure between March and May.

**Southern Peninsula**

The Southern peninsula has still not recovered from the shocks suffered as a result of Hurricane Thomas. Its banana plantations and breadfruit trees, which should be laden with fruit ready for harvesting at this time of year, were devastated by wind and floods. Consumers are currently paying 12.50 gourdes for a single breadfruit, which would normally buy nine of these fruits at this time of year. The production period for yams, which are used as a substitute food, is nearly over. As projected in the outlook, sorghum production in this area will be approximately 40 percent below-average. Bean harvests in a few production sites like Les Anglais will be slightly larger than average.

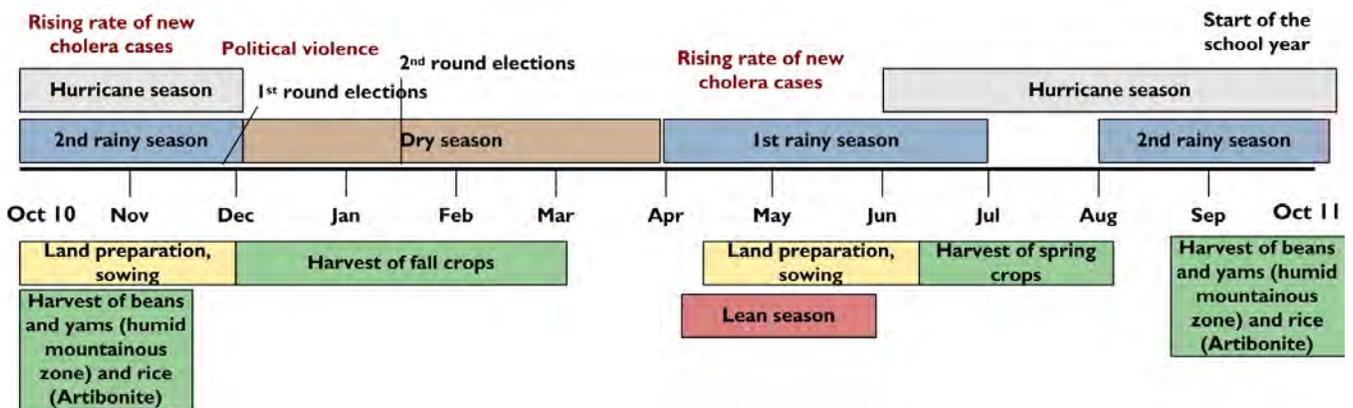
The harvesting period for black bean crops in irrigated plain areas and certain wet mountain areas spans the entire month of February, ensuring better food availability in crop-producing areas for that month. However, March and April coincide with the lean season when, with the already high price of food, very poor and poor households having lost livestock during Hurricane Thomas, their main source of income, will be facing a food deficit. These households will be moderately to highly food-insecure between February and May, particularly in certain municipalities in coastal areas of the Southern department and in Grand' Anse.

The cholera epidemic, which spread into virtually all corners of the peninsula in November and December, has been on the decline. Fishing villages and workers in the fishing industry hurt by the decline in fish and seafood consumption can expect production to more or less return to normal. Many households won over by the awareness-building campaigns mounted by interested government agencies are beginning to go back to eating fish. Market supplies have improved since December, and restaurant operators are offering fish to their clients, who seem more favorably disposed to eating it.

There has been quite a large influx of aid into municipalities on the southern peninsula since December. Labor-intensive projects and food distribution programs are underway in Grand' Anse. Households in coastal cities in the Southern department are receiving grants of up to 10,000 gourdes. This cash transfer program is targeting some six different municipalities, with 1,000 recipients per municipality.

Very poor and poor households in Grand' Anse severely affected by Hurricane Thomas will be highly food-insecure between March and May if these programs are suspended.

**Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline**



Source: FEWS NET