GUATEMALA
Food Security Outlook

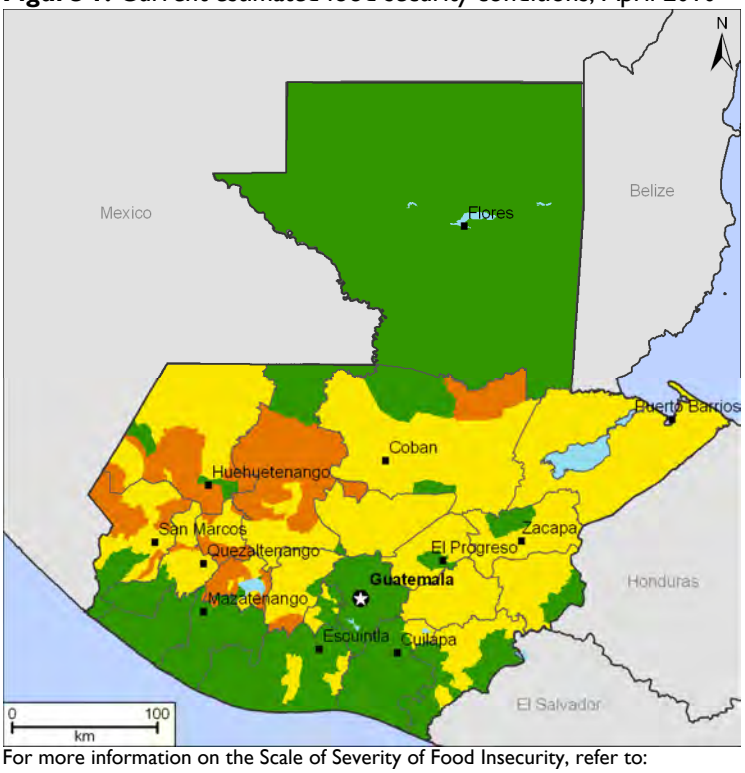
April to September 2010

- The poorest households in the country now face the annual hunger season, which began early this year. This season will end between August and September, with the *primera* harvest. In the highlands, it will end in November or December.

- The prices of basic foods show values above the minimum wage and are not expected to decline, thus reducing economic access to food for the population in a time when dependence on purchasing food is high.

- The weather forecast indicates rain within a normal range, or even above normal for areas in the south, east, and central plateau of the country. This improves agricultural projections for the *primera* season, but also poses a risk to areas susceptible to flooding and landslides. Proper management of information related to climate forecasts could reduce the impact of these events on the food security of households. The availability of water resources will also improve starting in April, with the onset of the rains.

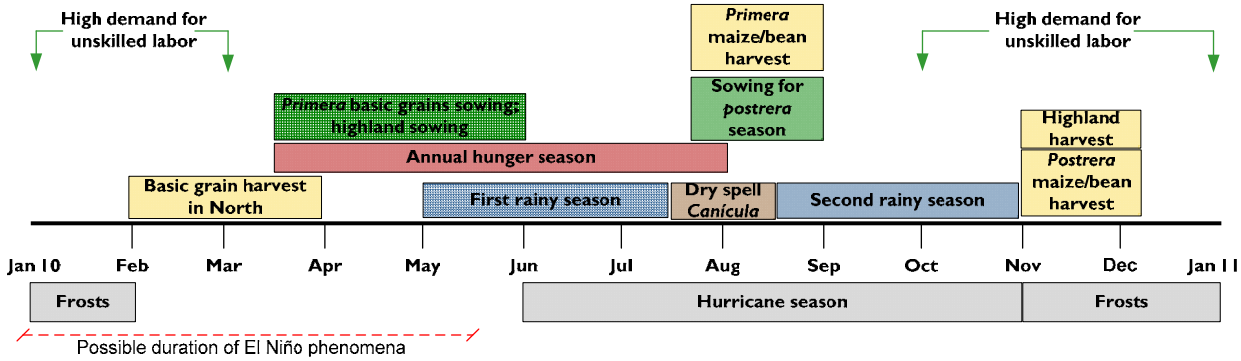
Figure 1. Current estimated food security conditions, April 2010



For more information on the Scale of Severity of Food Insecurity, refer to: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

Source: *MFEWS*

Seasonal calendar and critical events



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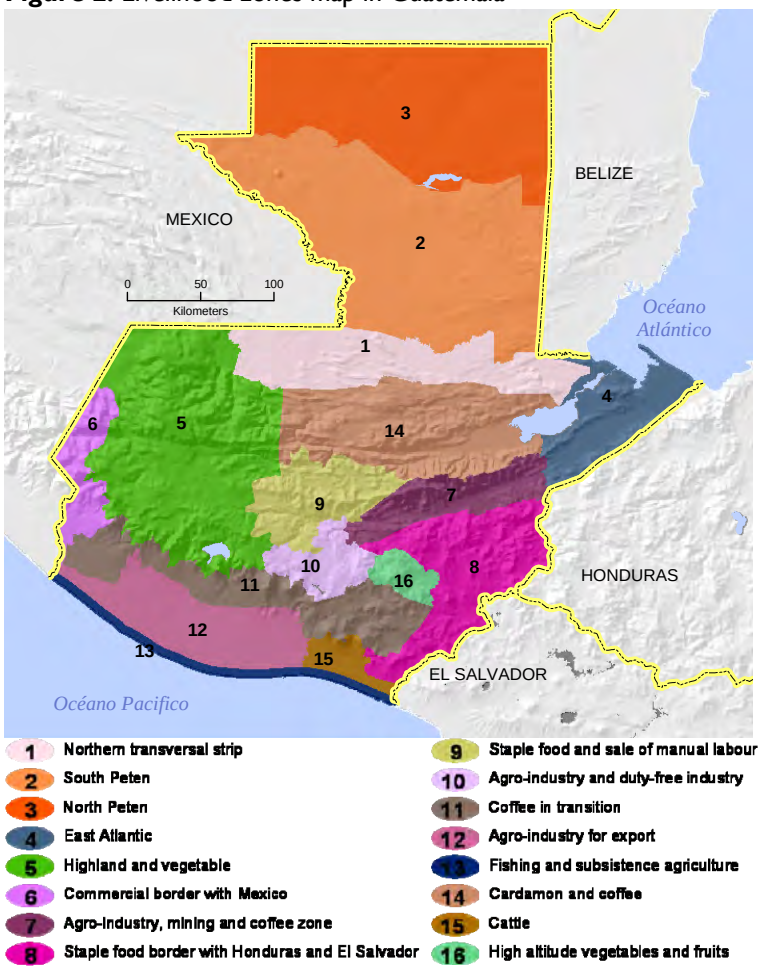
Current food security conditions

Currently, the poorest households in the country are facing the annual hunger season, where they depend on purchasing to obtain their food after they have exhausted their reserves. Although this period is recurrent, it is more critical this year due to agricultural losses suffered during the previous year, which resulted in a reduction in reserves that did not last as long as expected.

The availability of labor opportunities in the coming months will be very low, as the harvest season for agro-export goods, which requires intensive unskilled labor, has already concluded. This is the case for crops like sugar cane, coffee, melon, and watermelon, among others. The poorest households get their income as unskilled labor for these crops. They use their income to purchase agricultural inputs as well as food until the next harvest, which will occur between August and September for most of the country.

Figure 2. Livelihood zones map in Guatemala



Source: *MFEWS*

Due to low rainfall received in the last year, water sources are at disturbingly low levels. There are reports regarding rationing the distribution of water for human consumption and reports of an increase in the incidence of forest fires. A decrease in the availability of drinking water can cause the population to opt for alternative sources of a lower quality to meet their needs. Additionally, with the onset of rains, water sources increase, bringing with them substances and solids that increase their levels of contamination. Therefore, in the period from March to May, we see a seasonal increase in diarrhea and vector-borne diseases. Forest fires also cause respiratory diseases due to air pollution. This increases morbidity and affects the health of the population, while also increasing the nutritional requirements of younger children, combined with reduced food consumption due to lack of appetite. This results in weight loss, which is a sign of nutritional deterioration.

The prices of basic foods have shown an upward behavior, placing them above the average for the past five years and with a cost above the minimum wage, which hinders the access households may have to food, since they must also meet other basic needs with that income.

The government began tracking cases of moderate and severe acute malnutrition from August 2009. Although there are insufficient references to make the analysis, the cumulative rate of severe acute malnutrition through the first week of April is concerning in the departments of Chiquimula, Zacapa, and Baja Verapaz, included in the so-called 'dry corridor', followed by Quiché and San Marcos. The Government of Guatemala declared a State of Calamity in September of last year to address the situation, and the international cooperation also began managing projects aimed at alleviating the crisis and reducing food vulnerability this year and next. Projects such as Title II emergency programs funded by USAID and Action Against Hunger (ACF) are already being implemented in the dry corridor, while others are still awaiting financing and authorization, like the Flash Appeal issued by the United Nations in early March.

The highlands are particularly deficient in the production of basic grains, even in a normal year, making the area dependent on surplus production areas for its supply, such as the south coast, southern Petén, and the North Transversal Corridor, and parts of Chiquimula, Jalapa, Jutiapa, Santa Rosa, in the east. Poor and extremely poor households in this area (which

represent 52 and 25 percent of the population, respectively) depend on market purchases for 80 percent of consumed maize. Poor households also source approximately 71 percent of consumed beans from markets. Last year's crop yields dropped below the usual levels due to a rainfall deficit. For this reason, the dependence of poor and extremely poor households on purchasing this year is taking place one or two months earlier than normal. However, the harvest in surplus areas was good and can meet the needs of the region with the biggest obstacle being the purchasing power of the poorest families. The variety and quantity of food consumed will be reduced because the amount of money generated is the same as last year and must last longer since it is more difficult to find options to generate income during this period.

The *postrera* harvest in the North Transversal Corridor in the northern region of the country and the southern region of Peten had very good yields of beans between February and March, and maize between March and April. Household reserves in the area are filled, while demand for labor and wages is normal.

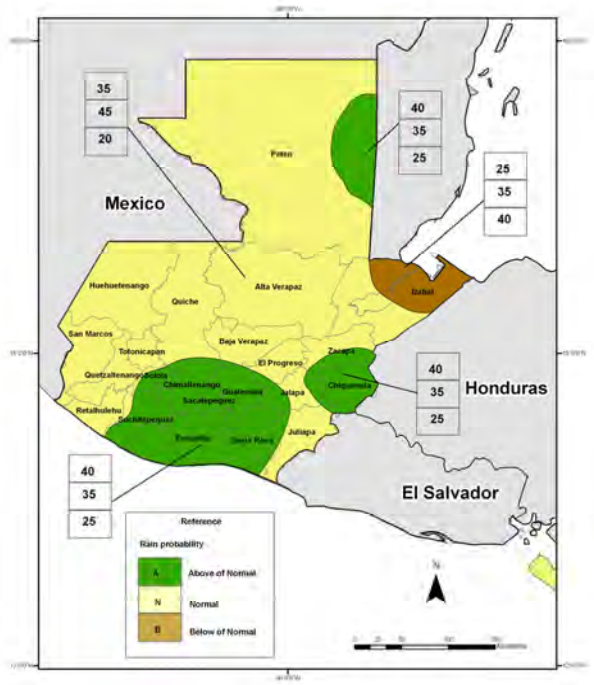
The prices of basic grains reported in La Terminal market in Guatemala City are at levels similar to those of last year; however, they are above average when compared to average values over the past five years, especially in the case of beans and rice.

Most-likely scenario for April – September 2010

The most-likely scenario for the next six months is based on some of the following assumptions:

- Revenues generated during the peak season for unskilled labor for coffee, sugar cane, melon, and cardamom crops are not enough to cover cash needs for the purchase of food for the period covered by this report.
- Weather forecasts indicate that the cumulative rainfall for the May-July quarter (the period when the *primera* sowing starts in the country) will behave as follows: above normal in the southern and eastern regions, and the central plateau; below normal in the Caribbean region; and normal in the rest of the country. Additionally, May is expected to be deficient in rainfall, while June will be normal, and July will have excess rainfall.
- The program for the delivery of subsidized fertilizer will begin late and will be carried out through coupon delivery. Although the prices are below those of the past two years, they are still above those in 2007, which means that it is difficult for the poorest farmers to purchase fertilizer. Product availability in the market is assured.

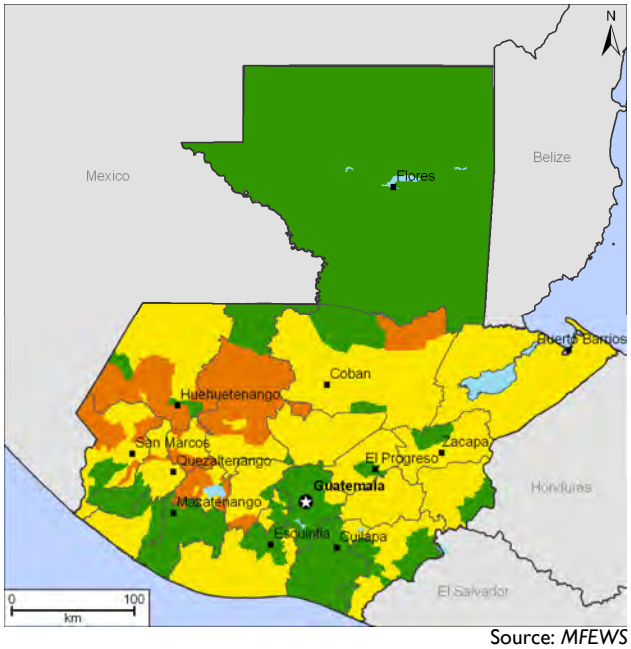
Figure 3. Weather Forecast, May-July 2010



Source: *Central American Climate Forum*

- The annual hunger season, which began early in January/February, will conclude with the *primera* harvest in August/September.

Figure 4. Food security conditions map in the most-likely scenario, April-June 2010



Source: *MFEWS*

Increase in water resources and more stable rainfall patterns across the country will support the growth of wild food, such as herbs, which will improve food availability in the poorest households, since they rely on gathering wild foods during the annual hunger season.

Forecasts for the hurricane season indicate that, due to very warm temperatures in the Atlantic Ocean, this could be more active than normal. Cyclone activity tends to be more intense from August, especially during October and November. The effect of a cyclonic event in the country will depend on its path and intensity. There is potential for flooding and landslides in specific areas located in the path of the phenomenon. The uncertainty inherent to the forecast makes it impossible to incorporate a storm into the outlook's most likely scenario. For more information, see the table of conditions that could change the food security outlook at the end of this report.

Due to the poor performance of recent agricultural cycles, it is of utmost importance to implement actions aimed at securing a good yield in the farmers' *primera* harvest of basic grains throughout the country. This is particularly true for subsistence farmers who will require input and technical assistance as well as consistent and timely weather information. The National Institute of Seismology, Volcanology, Meteorology, and Hydrology (Instituto Nacional de Sismologia, Vulcanologia, Meteorologia e Hidrologia (INSIVUMEH)) should carry out a constant monitoring of forecasts. In the short and medium term, the generation of revenue options will also be important to facilitate the purchasing power of affected families.

Dry corridor (livelihood zones 7, 8, and 9)

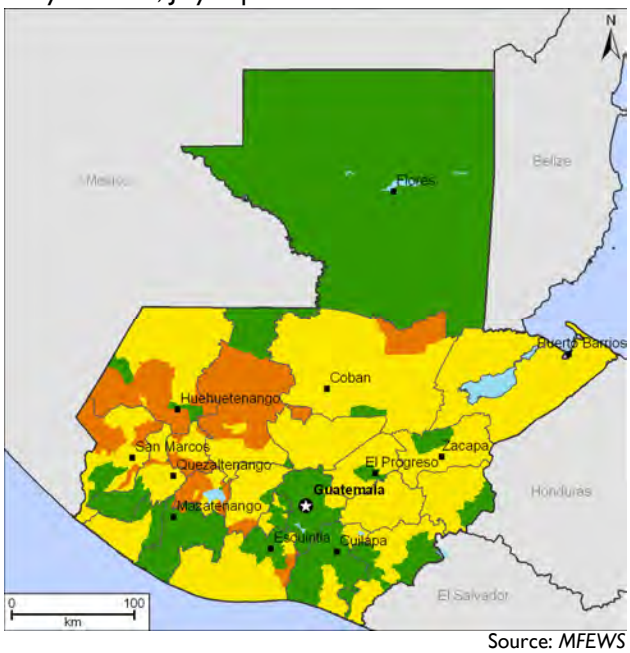
The food security situation has deteriorated since August 2009 with the two crops of maize and beans in 2009/10 being highly deficient, particularly the *postrera* harvest. Revenues have been used earlier than normal to buy food, though they have been within the normal range or sometimes below normal due to a reduced demand for labor in melon plantations because of the closure of businesses this year (especially in the area of Huité, Cabañas, and San Diego).

From April until September, particular assumptions for this zone are:

- The climate forecasts will benefit agricultural activity, allowing for better *primera* harvests.
- The Government of Malawi (through food bags or '*bolsas solidarias*'), the World Food Program (WFP), and USAID's Title II projects will eventually be able to respond to a higher demand for food aid and will improve food availability in households which are already being served. Currently, monthly rations that have been delivered cover between 25 to 50 percent of caloric requirements for a family of six. There is no exact data regarding coverage.
- During the period of April to September there is always a considerable reduction in employment options.
- The call for funds made by the United Nations system in early March has only been able to commit five percent of the amount requested. Therefore, not all activities which are needed between now and August will be carried out when the scarcity period ends.
- The *primera* sowing will start at the end of May or beginning of June.

The reserves of the poorest households have been finished, and the annual hunger season, which ends in August, continues. Therefore, these households will depend on purchasing food until the *primera* harvest in August/September, thus increasing the need for income generation. Households work on finding jobs either locally planting vegetables such as tomatoes and bell peppers or doing housework, but if they do not find jobs, men will migrate temporarily to Peten, the capital city and to the United States where possible. As an additional response strategy, households resort to a reduction in the quantity and quality of food consumed, and they also resort to the sale of animals because they do not have enough grain to feed them.

Figure 5. Food security conditions map in the most-likely scenario, July-September 2010



Source: *MFEWS*

There are no figures showing that the levels of food insecurity are getting worse. This is thanks to the care received after the reported crisis late last year, which allowed for the provision of food aid and supported productive activities. The duration of these programs is projected to last until September or October 2010. This will allow for the availability of food in the area to be better than expected as the annual hunger season concludes between August and September with the *primera* harvest. In this regard, it is classified as a moderate food insecurity region in the maps (Figures 2 and 3), because it has support networks through projects and programs implemented in the region. If these projects and programs fail, the situation will deteriorate rapidly.

There is a high probability of accumulated rain above normal in the period from May to July, particularly through June. The average accumulated precipitation for the quarter in question is 166 millimeters. Additionally, it is expected that the dry spell in July could be moderate and interrupted by some periods of rain. The availability of water for human and animal consumption, as well as for agriculture, will improve considerably with the arrival of the rains. The rain will be benefitting crop production harvested from August to September and, therefore, also the availability of food reserves by the end of 2010 and the following year. Higher moisture in the soil and environment will also encourage the growth of wild foods for this period, which will complement the diet of poorer households.

Highlands (livelihood zones 5, 17, and 18)

The food security situation during this period will be critical to this area. The most-likely scenario for the next six months is based on some of the following assumptions:

- It is expected that the onset of the rainy season be in mid May, which will allow sowing activities to be carried out on time. Additionally, the climatic perspective for the period from May to July is of accumulated rain within normal range, thus avoiding crop losses due to hydric stress.
- The program for the delivery of subsidized fertilizer will begin, according to indications from *ProRURAL*, during the second half of May.

The food security situation for the population of the highlands will be deteriorating during the next six months due to the low availability of food from their crops. The days worked and the daily income earned are less than those during time of the sugar cane *zafra* or coffee harvest, and while revenues decrease, expenses increase. The prices of basic grains have seasonal increases, and the price of fuel, which also increases seasonally from now until August, will also increase the price of food. The poorest households, which get grains, sugar, salt, and some other products through purchasing, will gradually reduce their access to food during the outlook period.

In agriculture, weather forecasts indicate that precipitation will be within a normal range. In this region, the average rainfall for the period of May to July is 335 millimeters, which will promote the germination of corn and beans seeds which have already been planted. Additionally, fertilization is important because of the poor quality of land and the lack of application of organic fertilizer. Although the prices of these inputs are below those of the past two years, they are still above the prices during 2007, and are not yet at a level that facilitates access for subsistence farmers. For this reason, untimely delivery of government-subsidized fertilizer will result in a decreased use of this input by this category of farmers, who have already planted their crops. This reduction will be reflected in the yields to be harvested later this year, though climatic conditions will be favorable for agriculture.

This area has not been prioritized for actions in response to food insecurity in the same dimension as the east, so the amount of food aid and production projects will be smaller, and the population coverage will also be smaller. However, since the conditions will not be as dry this year, gathering wild foods will be an option as a strategy to supplement the diet of the most vulnerable population. The reduction in the quantity and quality of food consumed will be noticeable starting in July. This means that an already deficient diet will be even more deficient.

Table 1. Possible events for the following six months that could change the food security outlook

Geographic Focal Area	Possible events	Impact on food security conditions	Probability*	Key variables to monitor
Dry corridor	Some projects that have been proposed for implementation in the area will receive the financial support necessary for final approval.	This will cause increased support for households in the area so that they may respond to the crisis.	Unlikely	Funds donated for this purpose by international cooperation
Dry corridor	Food aid programs already working in the area do not have the ability to increase their coverage in response to increased demands.	Food insecurity situation in the area will increase from moderate to high.	Unlikely	Availability of reserves and purchasing power of the poorest people in the region
Entire country	A tropical storm could reach Guatemala.	It could cause substantial losses in crops, infrastructure, and lives as a result of floods and landslides.	Unlikely	Occurrence, intensity, and path of cyclonic events in the Caribbean and Pacific basins
Entire country	A variation in the rainfall forecast (excess or deficit).	Too much could cause flooding and landslides, while a deficit could affect germination and crop development. In both cases, it could result in crop losses that could extend the annual hunger season.	Unlikely	Record of precipitation, the forecast, and anomalies

** Probability levels*	*Description*
Unlikely	Could happen in the period of time if conditions change moderately
Very unlikely	Could happen in the period of time if conditions change significantly