

## MAURITANIA Food Security Outlook

Through December 2008

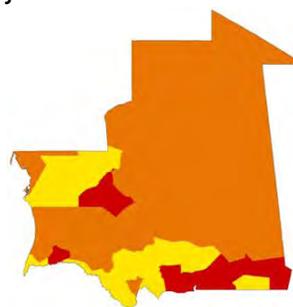
- The rainy season (June through September) has settled in across rainfed farming areas (Figure 1, zone 6) and agropastoral areas (zone 5). Distributions of seed aid by the government and the FAO have improved seed availability, allowing farmers in these areas to start sowing crops as early as the first dekad of July. However, even with these assistance programs, many farmers are purchasing seed after failing to save seed from their own production due to poor harvests in recent years. If migrant workers return home to work their land by early July, the size of the area planted in *dieri* (rainfed) crops should be significantly larger than last year, when the acreage under crops already topped the five-year average.
- The improvement in conditions in pastoral areas (zones 5 and 6 and the eastern reaches of zone 7) has eased food insecurity for pastoralists and agropastoralists compared with the second quarter of the year (Figures 2A and B). However, this improvement is tenuous, in that it is contingent on a good temporal distribution of rainfall.
- The food security of the rural farming population hinges on the implementation of emergency aid programs between now and the upcoming harvest (late August-September). Deprived of surplus flood-recession crops, which were diverted to other markets offering more attractive prices and facing sharp cuts in wheat imports, this population group is still being classified as moderately food-insecure.
- Regular deliveries of food for village-level food security reserves (SAVS) under ongoing emergency aid programs, distributions of free food aid by the World Food Program (WFP) and the government and the pick-up in grain exports by Mali have strengthened grain availability across the country. Coarse grain prices have come down since June, but are still running high compared with the five-year average. In contrast, prices for imported foods are rising again, with markets at larger distances from the city center reporting the largest hikes in prices (Table 1).

**Figure 1.** Livelihood zones map of Mauritania

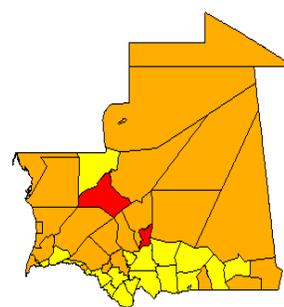


Source: FEWS NET

**Figure 2A.** Food security assessment, April through June



**Figure 2B.** Current food security assessment (July)



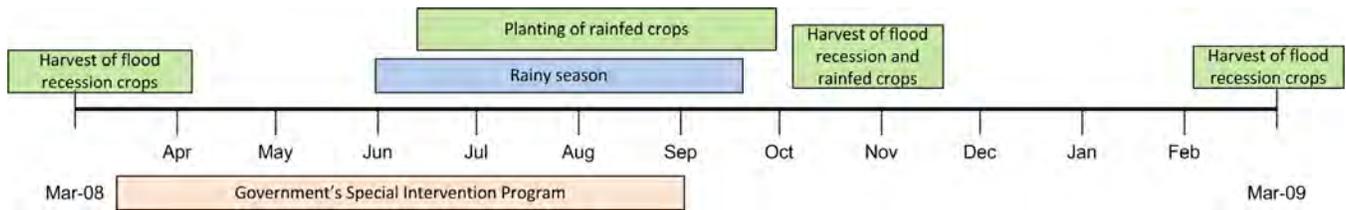
Source: FEWS NET

**Table 1.** Comparison of prices on a central (SOCOGIM) and outlying (Arrêt Bus) market

	Millet	Cowpeas	Imported rice	Wheat	Milk	Oil	Sardines	Water/200L
SOCOGIM	150	250	230	140	1350	420	100	230
ARRET BUS	170	280	250	160	1500	450	120	300

Source: FEWS NET Mauritania

Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline



Current food security conditions

The good distribution of rainfall and the extension of emergency aid programs should visibly improve food access and lower food insecurity levels in rural areas. Pastoral areas (zones 4 and 5) will benefit the most from this improvement in food security conditions. In contrast, the situation in urban areas is expected to continue to deteriorate in the face of steadily rising prices for imported staple foods.

Rainfall conditions and implications for production systems

Rainfall totals at major gauging stations in farming (zone 6) and agropastoral (zone 5) areas are visibly higher than at the same time last year and well above the 2003-2007 average (Figures 3A, B and C). Heavy rainfall in certain farming areas (Guidimakha and Hodh Echargui) has caused flooding and drowned crops but no assessment to evaluate the effects of these flooding problems on food security conditions has been conducted. Farmers in all crop-producing areas (zones 6, 5 and 7) are currently wet-planting crops. With the seed aid furnished by Italy and the FAO and the return of a large percentage of the rural workforce from temporary jobs in other areas, an expansion in the area planted in *dieri* (rainfed) crops is expected. Millet and sorghum crops in the southeastern and southern parts of the country are already in the tillering stage, with early-planted short-cycle sorghum crops at the peak growth stage.

Figure 3A. Cumulative rainfall totals for the period from the 1<sup>st</sup> dekad of April to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> dekad of July

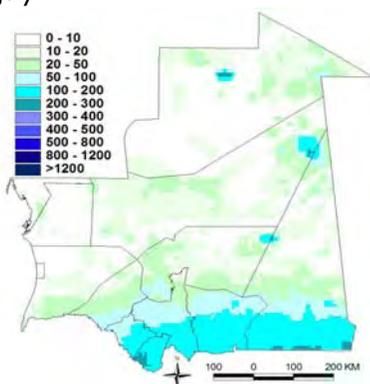


Figure 3B. Comparison of cumulative rainfall totals for this season with the 2003-2007 average

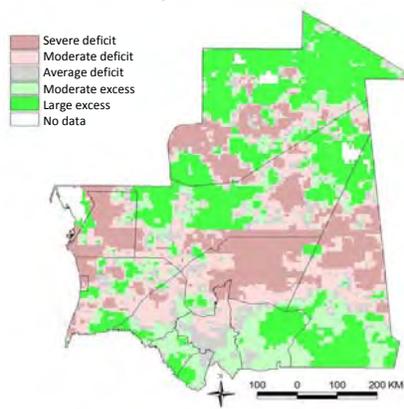
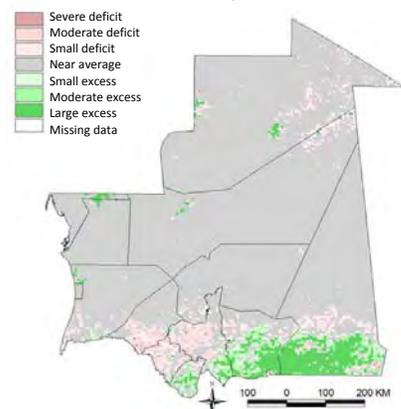


Figure 3C. Comparison of the condition of vegetation in July with the 2003-2007 average



Source: FEWS NET

Rural areas

The improvement in conditions in pastoral areas with the growth of fresh pasture and the presence of surface water resources in zones 6, 5 and 7 and the southeastern reaches of zone 4 should lower food insecurity levels as compared to the second quarter of the year, particularly with the assistance programs in these areas working so well. Livestock prices have risen again (by 14 percent on the Rosso market compared with May prices) since the beginning of the rainy season in

reaction to tightening supplies, with pastoralists no longer eager to sell their animals due to the improvement in grazing and watering conditions.

The main household coping strategies currently being employed are the selling of livestock and reliance on village-level food security reserves (SAVS), where they exist and are operational. Elsewhere, poor and middle-income households are resorting to mortgaging future harvests as collateral for borrowing food crops and depending on occasional cash remittances from family members temporarily or permanently working in other areas.

**Urban and urban fringe areas**

Food insecurity levels in urban areas are steadily climbing in the face of rising prices for staple foodstuffs. This trend is especially striking in urban fringe areas farthest from the city center with the added pressure of recent hikes in fuel prices driving up shipping costs. To cope with this situation, poor households are constantly readjusting their consumption patterns, turning to lower quality foods, skipping meals and stepping up their informal activities to boost their income.

The situation of the approximately 24,000 returnees expelled by the government in the wake of the events of 1989, and of poor households in urban slum areas (numbering around 120,000) will need to be monitored, particularly in view of the rise in prices for staple foods and basic social services.

**Markets, trade and food access**

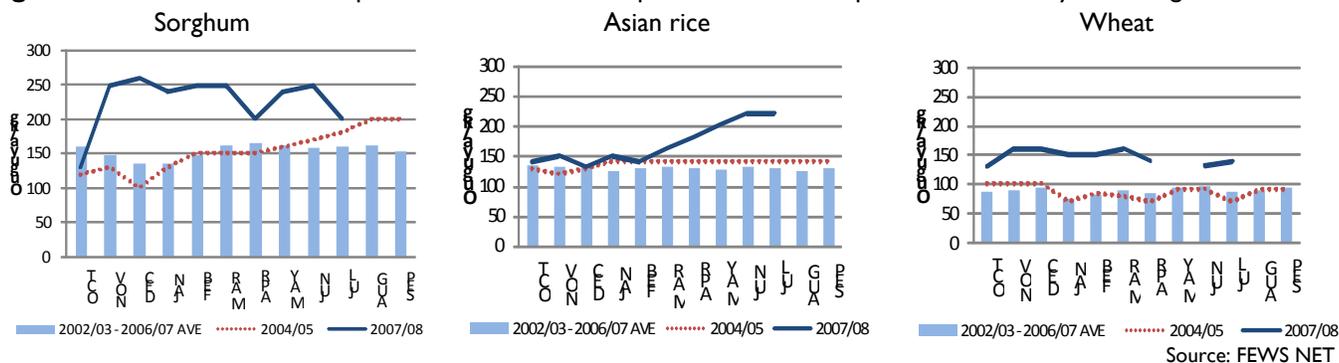
Markets have ample supplies of imported foodstuffs, with the exception of rice and wheat. Supplies of these commodities have tightened with the cutback in imports in response to rising world market prices. The 10 percent decline in the price of imported rice since June is attributable to the fact that current supplies are from Mali, rather than re-exports of high-priced Asian rice from Senegal. Supplies of this latter crop continues to dwindle on markets frequented by poor and middle-income households. Stepped-up exports from Mali (of 2006 grain crops unloaded by farmers and grain traders in the face of the promising rainfall outlook for this season) have significantly improved coarse grain supplies in general and supplies of sorghum and cowpeas in particular (Figure 4). This explains the visible decline in prices on the Nouakchott market (Table 2), which plays an important role in provisioning markets in the interior. However, these lower prices for coarse grains will have little effect on the food security status of households in urban fringe areas, where these grains little used due to their high processing costs. Instead, the rise in prices for wheat and imported Asian rice (Figure 4) will affect these households, since both products are staples of the standard urban diet.

**Table 2.** Trends in staple food prices on the Nouakchott market

	2003-2007 average	June 08	July 08	Change in price from June to July	Comparison of July prices with the 2003-2007 average (%)
Pearl millet	124	150	150	0	21
*Taghalit sorghum	160	250	200	-20	25
*Bichne sorghum	257	300	250	-17	-3
Cowpeas	360	300	250	-17	-31
Corn	116	150	150	0	29
Imported rice	164	240	230	-4	40
Local rice	131	220	220	0	68
Wheat/human consumption	88	140	140	0	60

Source: FEWS NET

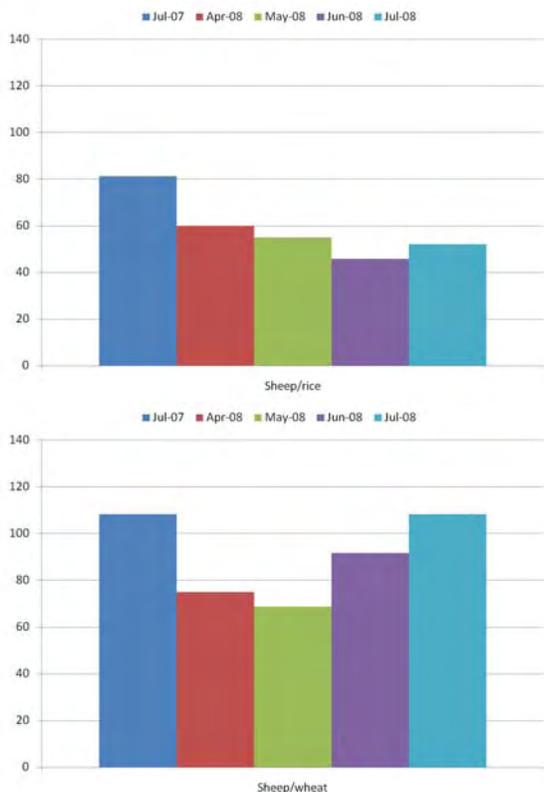
**Figure 4.** Current nominal food prices in Nouakchott compared with 2004/05 prices and the five-year average



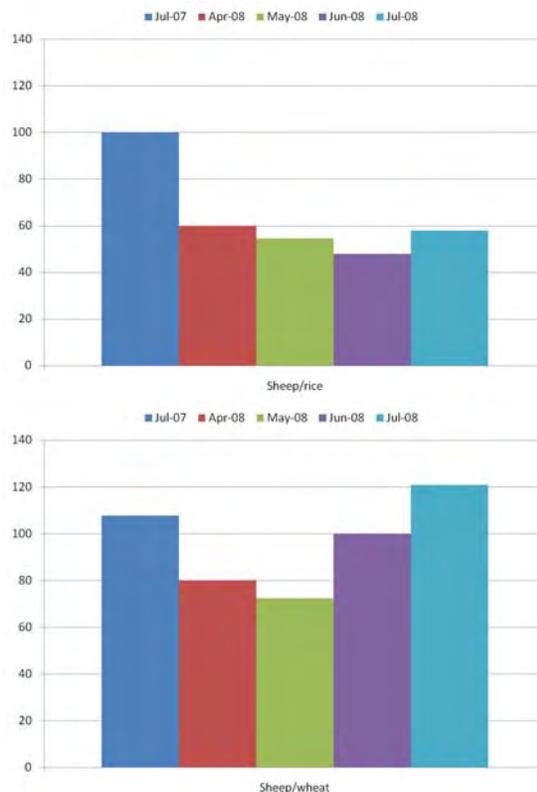
Source: FEWS NET

Exports of Mauritanian grain crops to Senegal have been suspended since the beginning of June following the steep hike in the price of rice, the decline in coarse grain prices, and with farm families preferring to consume their grain crops. All residents of areas targeted by assistance programs are still relying on village-level food security reserves (SAVS) for their staple food supply, primarily wheat. The combined effect of the rise in prices for small animals and the stable price of wheat sold under SAVS programs has significantly improved the food access of pastoralists and agropastoralists (Figures 5A and B).

**Figure 5A.** Trends in terms of trade in agropastoral areas (zone 5), July 2008



**Figure 5B.** Trends in terms of trade in transhumant pastoral areas (zone 4), July 2008



Source: FEWS NET

### Most likely food security scenario for October through December

#### In rural areas

The good distribution of rainfall has already helped promote the growth of fresh pasture in all pastoral areas, triggering a sizeable jump in prices for small animals. This trend should gain momentum over the next few months (August and September), bolstering the food access of pastoralists and agropastoralists alike. The condition of vegetation and the availability of surface water resources are such that, barring an extended drought or large-scale locust invasion, this population group (agropastoralists and pastoralists) appears to have averted a crisis, as long as it continues to reap the benefits of ongoing assistance programs.

Measures implemented by the government and its partners (e.g., distributions of seed aid, incentives encouraging the rural workforce to return to farming areas, the rehabilitation of crop irrigation schemes, the extension of farm loans, the desilting of tributaries and distributaries) should help improve farming conditions for rainfed crops and significantly expand the size of the area planted compared with last year. Assuming that farmers continue to use traditional farming strategies (planting short-cycle sorghum and millet crops early in the season), this group of households should be harvesting as early as September complementing flows of aid from emergency programs. If long-cycle crops do well, the living conditions of these farmers should be back to normal by September. However, their food security is still extremely tenuous in that, with

their dependence on a single annual harvest of *dieri* (rainfed) crops, a string of production shortfalls over the past several years has caused them to build up large quantities of debt, which is generally repaid from future harvests or migration income (Figure 6).

Even if the current pattern of rainfall continues and water levels, which are already looking promising (Figure 7), continue to rise, the food access of farmers growing flood-recession crops (zones 7, 2 and 5) will not really begin to improve until next February, with the harvesting of rainfed bottomland crops. Currently, this population group is still resorting to traditional coping strategies (e.g., out-migration, skipping meals and cutting their food intake, selling small animals, and borrowing money) and receiving program aid.

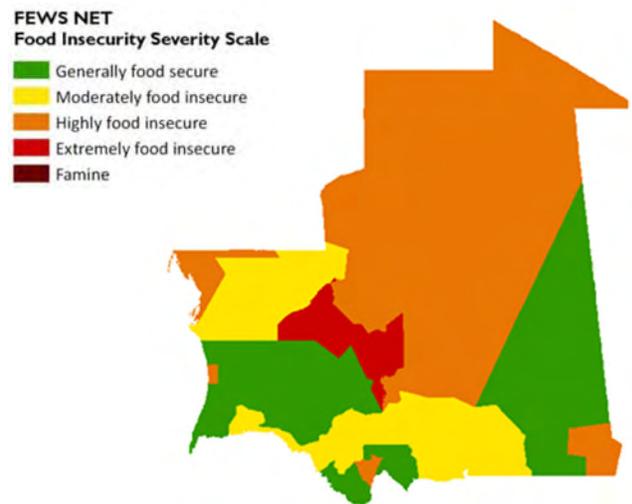
**In urban areas**

The food situation in urban areas is expected to continue to deteriorate with prices for staple food crops still running high and steadily climbing. The recent 20 percent hike in fuel prices and disruptions in deliveries of supplies (mainly Malian exports) with the onset of the rainy season could reverse the stabilization of coarse grain prices and small decline in prices for Malian rice.

**Worst-case scenario for October through December**

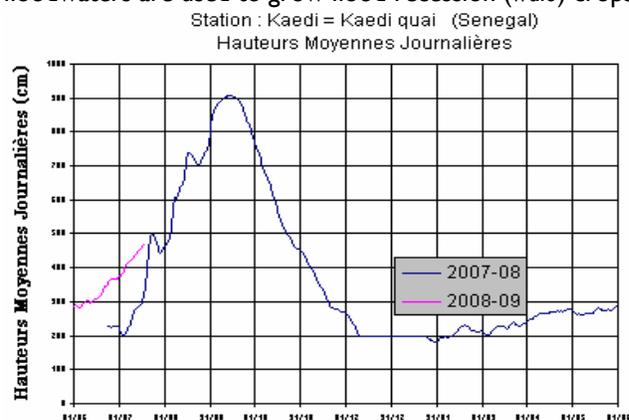
While there is cause for optimism over conditions through the end of December, any major shock could reverse the recent improvements in food access, particularly in pastoral areas (zones 4, 5 and 7) and rainfed farming areas (zone 6). In fact, an extended drought or a shorter than usual rainy season, insufficient runoff from flooding rivers, or a large-scale locust invasion could destroy crops and pasturelands and plunge rural households back into a state of food insecurity. This food insecurity would be exacerbated by their reliance on a market system characterized by limited market inventories due to trader fears of a slump in sales in the face of ongoing assistance programs. In such case, it would take some time for traditional strategies (buying or borrowing from traders) to begin working again, while rising prices for substitute foods (rice, wheat, food pastes) would continue to weaken terms of trade for this group of households. The most vulnerable areas in such a scenario would be rainfed farming and agropastoral areas (Figure 8).

**Figure 6.** Most likely food security scenario for October through December



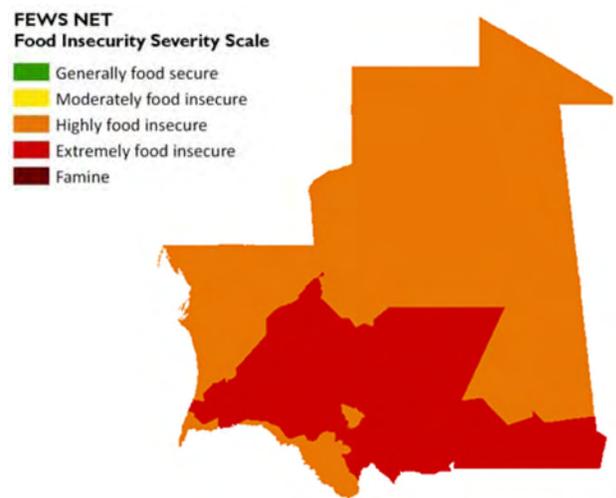
Source: FEWS NET

**Figure 7.** Trends in the level of the Senegal River, whose floodwaters are used to grow flood recession (*walo*) crops



Source: National Weather Service (ONM)

**Figure 8.** Worst-case food security scenario for October through December



Source: FEWS NET

## TRANSLATION OF TEXT IN GRAPHICS

Figure 1

Use standard legend

Figures 2A and B

Fews Net food insecurity severity scale

Use standard legend

Timeline

Harvest of flood-recession crops

Rainy season

Harvest – Sowing of flood-recession crops

Harvest

Harvest of flood recession crops

[change months to English]

Special government intervention program

Figure 3B

Severe deficit

Moderate deficit

Near average

Moderate excess

Large excess

Missing data

Figure 3C

Severe deficit

Moderate deficit

Small deficit

Near average

Small excess

Moderate excess

Large excess

Missing data

Figure 4

Vertical axis: UM/kg

Horizontal axis: [illegible]

Figure 5A

Trends in terms of trade in agropastoral zone 5 in July 2008

UM/kg

[change months to English]

Sheep/rice

Sheep/wheat

Figure 5B

Trends in terms of trade in transhumant pastoral areas in July 2008

UM/kg

[change months to English]

Sheep/rice

Sheep/wheat

Figure 6

Same text as Figure 2

Figure 7

Station: Kaedi = Kaedi river bank (Senegal River)

Daily mean gauge heights

Daily mean gauge heights (cm)

Figure 8

Same text as Figure 2

Translator's Note: Could not access footer on page 2 to change to English due to the overlapping figure (changed as of pg 3).