GUATEMALA Food Security Outlook October 2009 to March 2010

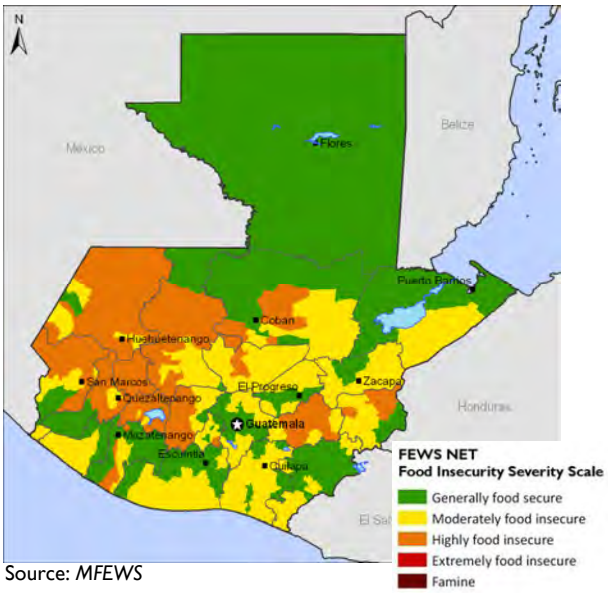
- Food insecurity increased due to a combination of climatic, economic, and sanitary factors, which led to an increase in the number of acute malnutrition cases in children under five, especially in the dry corridor.

- The rainy season, from August to November, was below normal. This has already affected *postrera* crops and the population's health. The most vulnerable areas are the dry corridor, which includes the eastern and central departments, and some municipalities in Quiché and Huehuetenango.

- The season of high demand for unskilled labor in the harvest of export crops such as coffee, sugarcane, melon, and watermelon is between September and March. Although normal labor demand is foreseen, there is an excess supply of people seeking work; consequently, not everyone will be hired.

- It is important to determine the extent of agricultural damages and the state of food security among affected populations, as well as the existence of household reserves during the first months of next year, in order to provide appropriate assistance. This should include the timely delivery of agricultural supplies at the beginning of 2010, in order to improve next year's yields.

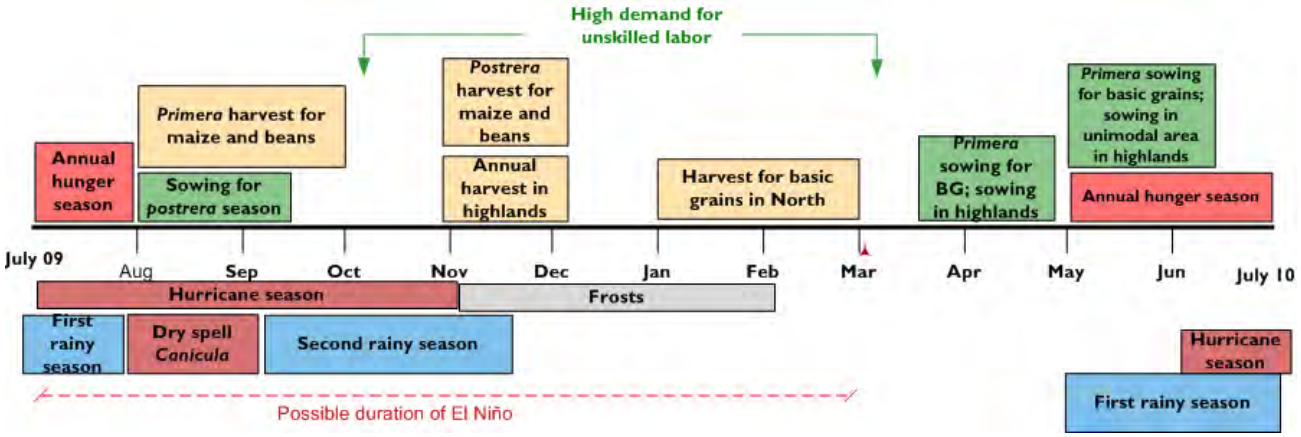
Figure 1. Current estimated food security conditions, September 2009



Source: *MFEWS*

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

Seasonal calendar and critical events



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Current food security conditions

Guatemala's social and economic inequality is structural, which is reflected in the high prevalence of chronic malnutrition in elementary students. This implies a high degree of vulnerability to food insecurity. The last national census reports a stunting level of 45.6 percent, the highest in Latin America. That said series of events that have taken place since last year have further aggravated the food insecurity situation. This has caused an increase in acute malnutrition cases in children under 5, especially in the departments within the 'dry corridor', and more specifically in Jalapa. The high cost of agricultural supplies derived from oil (like fertilizers), the delay in delivery of products subsidized by the government, and excessive rainfall, which caused pests and diseases, produced a decrease in the yields of subsistence farmers in 2008. This decrease had a direct impact on the quantity of grains available for consumption in 2009, causing households to deplete reserves a month earlier than normal. During the annual hunger season, subsistence farmer households all the country practically depend upon purchase for food. The increase in basic food prices, which began in April/May 2008, and has not fallen previous levels, has reduced the population's purchasing power, making economic access to food difficult.

Households whose harvest was reduced hoped that the first staple cereal harvest, foreseen for August or September (and November or December in the highlands), would be good, to alleviate the deficiency in food access and availability. The rainy season this year began early with high levels of accumulated rain, which predicted positive agricultural results. Nevertheless, new problems with fertilization and rain irregularity, which began in May/June, and was more noticeable between June and September, caused significant subsistence crop losses in parts of the country. Due to losses as a result of decreased rainfall, some feasible areas were hoping for a good second harvest. However, *postrera* crops also suffered damages and losses. These losses will reduce food availability for households, especially if they are total losses, because they will extend the critical season. The Ministry of Agriculture, in conjunction with FAO and other government and international institutions, like *Red Humanitaria*, are carrying out loss assessments. The results will provide new information about the magnitude of the losses. *Acción Contra el Hambre (ACH)* recently published a report of an evaluation that took place in ten municipalities in the dry corridor; it reports a 37 percent loss in the *primera* harvest and an estimated 73 percent loss for the *postrera* harvest. It also reports, for all the households assessed, acute malnutrition figures seven times higher than statistics from the National Survey of Maternal Infant Health 2002 for the southeastern region (7.7 percent versus 1.1 percent). The municipalities assessed were Camotán, Jocotán, San Juan Ermita in Chiquimula; Jalapa, San Luis Jilotepeque and San Pedro Pinula in Jalapa; El Jícaro and San Agustín Acasaguastlán in El Progreso; Huité in Zacapa; and, Santa Catarina Mita in Jutiapa.

The situation is also complicated due to factors such as the increase of reported classic and hemorrhagic dengue cases in departments like Petén and Izabal, and of respiratory diseases in several departments in the east, which also affect the use of food. According to IOM's last report, the increase in unemployment and sub-employment, and the continuous fall of remittances as a result of the international economic crisis (11 percent lower than the previous year), creates even more difficulties. Huehuetenango and San Marcos are the main departments which receive remittances, followed by Alta Verapaz and Quetzaltenango.

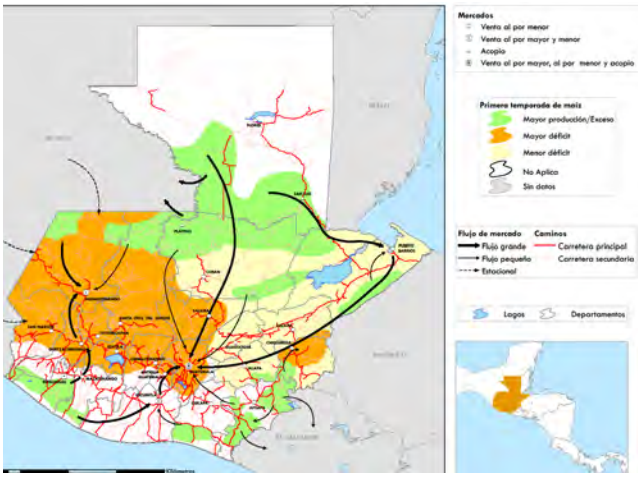
The El Niño phenomenon was officially declared at the beginning of July, and is foreseen to continue developing and to hold at least until the first quarter of 2010. This phenomenon will affect the climate from October to March, with rainfall within normal to below normal for the end of the season. The cold front season, from November to February, may affect mainly western areas with an increase in respiratory diseases, and the freezing of crops that are still found in the fields and waiting to be harvested. The adverse climatic and economic conditions will not affect only the dry corridor, since there are reports of losses and damages in other areas of the country, like some municipalities of the highlands in Quiché, San Marcos, Totonicapán, and Huehuetenango.

The government has decreed a State of Calamity in the whole country, in order to draw upon states resources and the international community. Various international agencies responded to the government's petition, by initiating funding negotiations to support such response. Up to this moment, the government has started to deliver food assistance in the eastern departments of the country with 'Food Bags', which contain maize, beans, and cooking oil. The delivery of this assistance is foreseen to take place until December 2009, to cover 56,000 families. Next year, USAID will be implementing a project to recover livelihoods and support for 27,000 families in the dry corridor. The United Nations issued a funding request for emergency response (CERF) for USD 4,999,993.

Most-likely Scenario (September 2009 – March 2010)

In the most-likely scenario for the next six months, the increase in the sources of unskilled labor may provide the economic resources to purchase food, alleviating the food insecurity of poor households in all the country. Although the first harvest in the **highlands** will take place between November and December, it will be lower than expected due to deficient rains in the last months. This will cause a reduction in subsistence household reserves to at least half of that obtained in a normal year. In the case of the poorest households, their reserves may last between one and four months; in poor households, they may last about four to six months.

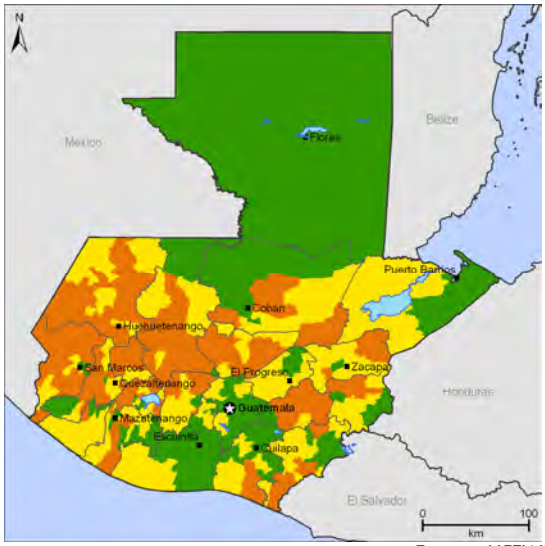
Figure 2. Production map and market flows for white maize. *Primera* harvest.



Source: *MFEWS*

This region is highly deficient in its production of staple grains, so it depends on surplus areas for its supply (Figure 2). These areas include the south coast, south of Petén and the North Transversal Corridor, and parts of the eastern region. Large producers, especially of maize, have more resources to deal with eventualities such as the lack of rain, so their production will be less affected.

Figure 3. Most-likely scenario, September - December 2009



Fuente: *MFEWS*

The price of maize has fallen for the producer, but not in the same proportion for the consumer, which could hinder access poor households' access to food in the highlands, which this year depend on purchase to a greater degree, and could discourage large-scale production of grain in surplus areas. The annual hunger season, which began early in March this year, will end in late November or December, with a harvest with yields between 60 and 80 percent. The poorest households in the highlands have reserves for about one to two months this year, so next year's hunger season will probably begin in February.

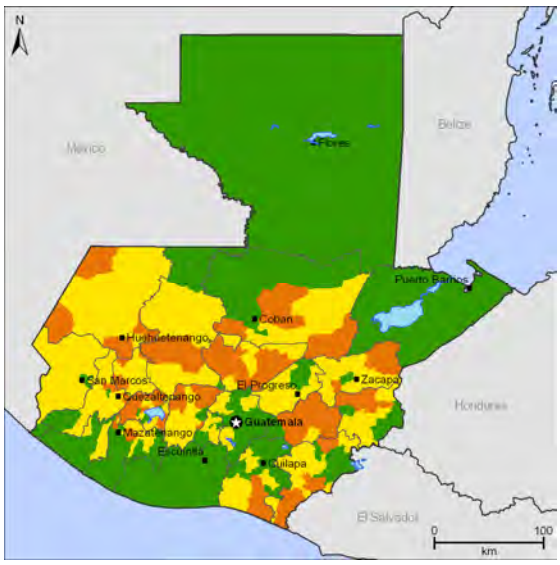
The annual winter frost season and cold fronts began in November in this region. This season usually continues until February. These phenomena have the potential to cause a higher frequency of respiratory diseases, which can affect the health of the population and hence their food security. Strong winds are also common during this period, which could also damage maize crops that have not yet been harvested. Close monitoring of the National Weather Service (INSIVUMEH) forecasts is suggested.

The poorest households of this area will have more access to cash as of October, when they begin to work as day laborers in the coffee and sugarcane harvests, which conclude between February and March. This will help alleviate the grain shortage at the household level. If enough jobs are awarded, this should enhance improve their status from highly insecure to moderately insecure. However, reports indicate that there is an excess labor supply this year, in part because of the poor harvests.

In addition, institutions such as Save the Children, SHARE, and CRS report that for some areas of the west, acute global malnutrition has increased where they have conducted measurements. This may indicate a deterioration in food security.

In the **east**, which includes the departments of Zacapa, Chiquimula, El Progreso, Jutiapa, Jalapa, and Baja Verapaz, the government and the World Food Program, through the ITC (Information Coordination Center), will provide food aid until

Figure 4. Most-likely scenario , January-March 2010



Source: *MFEWS*

December, while Title II NGOs (USAID-funded) will continue to do so until October 2010. If the targeting of beneficiaries is done correctly, they should mitigate the impact of losses during those months. However, the proposed number of served does not cover all the needy, and support should continue until the next harvest. Even with the need to supply the neediest families with food, the demand for staple grains in the market will not be significantly affected; thus, we do not expect prices to suffer a significant increase because of supply and demand, nor by speculation.

Income availability in this area will increase until February, since in October, high demand for unskilled labor to harvest crops such as melon and watermelon and vegetables like tomatoes and chili peppers, as well as coffee, begins. However, while the price of day labor is expected to be within normal ranges, jobs could be reduced. Consequently, some households will see an improvement in their economic access to food, while others won't benefit from this season.

The second harvest of beans is extremely important for this region. It generates a surplus and supplies the domestic market. However, producers that have no irrigation system will see their crops significantly affected, which could cause a decrease in market supply, therefore resulting in higher prices.

In the dry corridor, acute malnutrition rates have increased, and if food aid and the recovery of these people's livelihoods do not continue, it could further exacerbate food insecurity.

The **Pacific coast** experienced rainfall deficits in the first planting of maize, with reduced yields and significant losses. However, this region does not have a second planting of staple grains, which will cause a definite decline in food availability in poor households. During the *postrera* season, farmers in this area plant sesame, which they sell to obtain income for the purchase of agricultural supplies for the next maize crop. There are no reports that this crop has suffered a reduction in its yield, so they have ensured income for next year's crops. During this semester, another important source of income for people from the Pacific coast is work as day laborers in the sugarcane harvest and plantations of African oil palm and bananas/plantains, which will extend into the early months of next year. The demand for labor in these sectors is expected to be similar to previous years, which would help these households to obtain income.

The lack of rainfall during the rainy season this year across the country will cause a reduction in the availability of drinking water for the next six months, with emphasis in the first quarter of 2010. This quarter includes the beginning of the dry season and the warmest month, which could cause an increase in the incidence of diarrhea by drinking contaminated water and vector-borne diseases like dengue, which already presents above normal incidence rates in some departments.

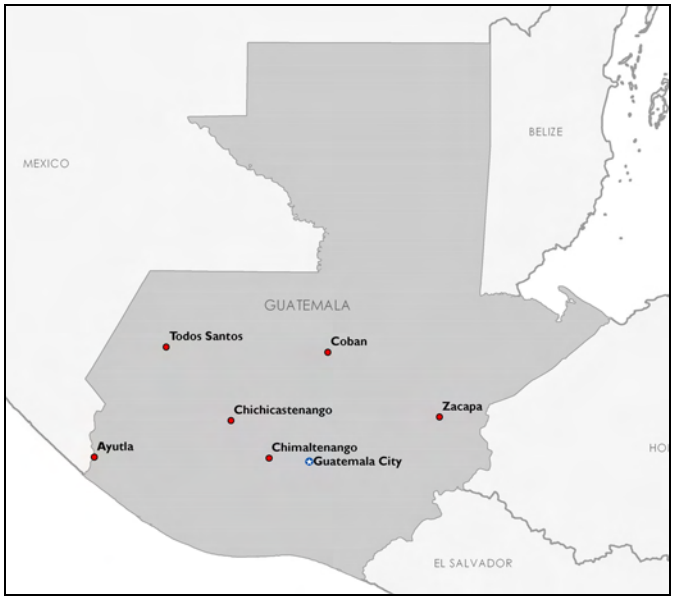
It is vitally important that next year's first harvest of staple grains is guaranteed for the entire country, so that the poorest households have access to food. This requires prioritizing the timely delivery of agricultural supplies, such as seed varieties suited to the weather forecasts and fertilizers. The process of delivering subsidized fertilizer should ensure timely delivery to those most in need.

Table 1. Events that could change the most likely scenario

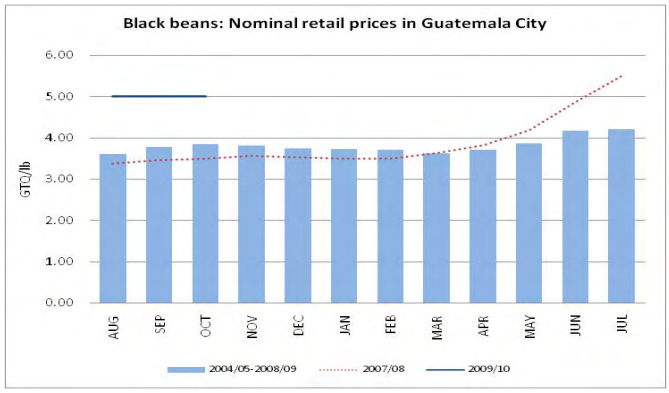
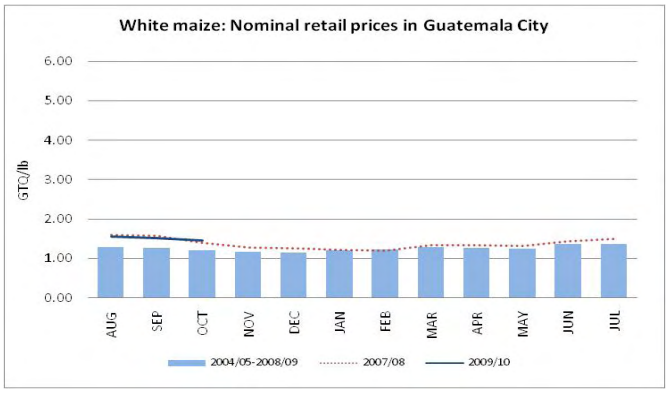
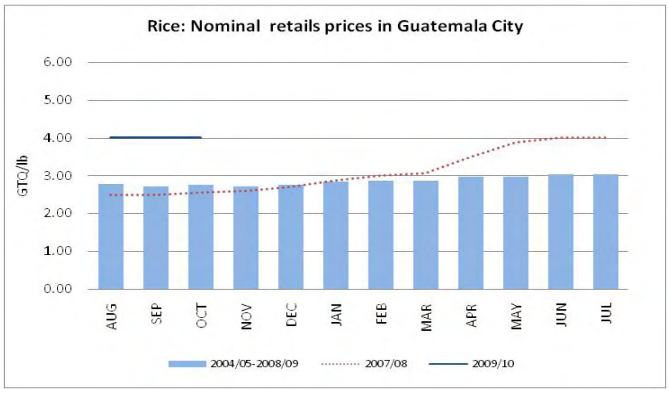
Geographic Focal Area	Possible events in the next six months that could change the most-likely scenario in this area	Impact on food security conditions	Probability *	Key variables to monitor
East (Zacapa, Chiquimula, El	Excessive rise in basic food prices,			

Progreso, Jutiapa, Jalapa and Baja Verapaz), and Pacific coast	especially maize and beans.	Difficulty in accessing food due to a reduction in purchasing power.	Very unlikely	Prices of staple cereals, basic food basket, and CPI
Highlands (West)	Excessive rise in basic food prices, especially maize and beans	Difficulty in accessing food due to a reduction in purchasing power.	Very unlikely	Prices of staple cereals, basic food basket, and CPI

**** 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.



Monthly prices are supplied by FEWS NET enumerators, local government agencies, market information systems, UN agencies, NGOs, and other network and private sector partners.

*NOTE: Historic prices only available for the capital city market. Data collection now starting in other markets noted on the map.

Maize is the main source of calories and protein in the Guatemalan diet. White maize is more heavily consumed than yellow maize, but the latter is preferred in some regions and used as poultry feed. Every Guatemalan household consumes black beans: as a protein source it is a particularly valuable complement to cereals in regions where households have limited access to animal products. Consumption habits are strongly linked to tradition and culture. Rice is mainly consumed in urban and peri-urban, but some rural households consume it as well. Guatemala is highly dependent on imported rice. The market in Guatemala City is the largest in the country and feeds the highest concentration of the population.