



Iraq COVID-19 Food Security Monitor

Weekly Update - Issue 19

05 October 2020

Government of Iraq (GoI) Announcements

Date	Government Decision
30 September 2020	For the first time since 2003, Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) will distribute barley seeds to farmers. ¹
02 October 2020	The Ministry of Agriculture started facilitating the export of barley and dates to a number of Arab and foreign countries for the advancement of the national economy, and with the involvement of the private sector in the development of these sectors. ²

I. Key Messages

- The Ministry of Agriculture has assisted Iraqi farmers using import bans to protect their production from competition as well as supported Iraq's farmers and traders by exporting this year bumper harvests of barley and dates.
- The Ministry of Trade continues to distribute delayed food rations, while paying back arrears owed to wheat farmers for their production from 2014/5 in addition to their 2020 harvest.
- The national average of main food commodity prices remained stable in the past two weeks, with some seasonal variations in vegetable prices between governorates.

II. Overview

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has continued to spread in Iraq. As of 5 October 2020, the World Health Organization reported 382,949 cases and 9,464 deaths, a 15% and 8% increase respectively over the preceding two weeks.³

The global economic slowdown, driven by measures to contain the spread of the illness, decreased the demand for oil and put downward pressure on prices. In Iraq, oil income accounts for 90% of the government revenue and the drop in oil prices has had a significant impact on country's finances. Over the past two weeks, Basra heavy oil prices have remained stable, with 39.30 per barrel, up from minimum of USD 18.7 per barrel in April 2020, but well below USD 58.4 per barrel, the price recorded roughly one year ago.⁴ As fiscal pressure mounts for the government, the Ministry of Finance has had to delay some salary payments of government employees and retirees in the month of September.

FAO organized a one day workshop with the ministry of agriculture, EU and many partners to discuss ongoing efforts to implement agricultural rehabilitation and development programs in Iraq that focus on job creation for farming communities and the private sector as well as support value chains in selected crop and livestock sub-sectors.⁵

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank continue to track the impact of this crisis on food security, with a focus on food availability, access, utilization and stability.

III. Food Supply: Production (primarily on farm)

Production. The Ministry of Agriculture has announced it will export around 700 thousand tons of dates from the Governorates including Karbala, Babylon,

Diyala and Basra to a number of Arab and foreign countries in an effort to boost revenue for the palm sector and the state treasury.⁶

Iraq has increased its self-sufficiency rate in a large number of crops and agricultural products, which has been reflected in community stabilization during COVID-19 pandemic. MoA has adopted a number of strategic plans to protect local produce including limiting imports according to agriculture calendar. MoA has also started a new program that provides agricultural land to farmers and agricultural graduates while granting them both financial loans and supplies.⁷

For the first time since 2003, the Mesopotamia General Seed Company is scheduled to receive and distribute high quality barley seeds to farmers, in time for the upcoming 2020/2012 cereal planting season. The seeds were produced through the program for the multiplication of higher seed classes of barley varieties. Foundation seeds will be distributed to farmers by Mesopotamia seed company. The varieties of seed produced showed higher productivity and are more climate resilient.⁸

The Ministry of Trade (MoT) announced that the General Trading Company for Grain Trade will start to distribute outstanding dues for the purchased wheat to the third batch of farmers and marketers in Basra (10,709,000,000 IQD), Muthana (12,846,000,000 IQD) and Najaf (10,014,000,000 IQD).⁹ The General Company for Grain Processing under the MoT, announced the completion of the processing and storage of wheat for the next year. Mills across Iraq received their rations of wheat and began to produce and distribute their full allocation of flour. The joint monitoring committees of MOT and MOA continue to follow up the work of the mills and agents in the governorates.¹⁰

The Administrative Deputy of the Ministry of Agriculture, Dr. Mahdi Sahar Al-Jubouri stated that it has developed a plan for distributing barley feed to all livestock breeders (for free) and to feed factories (50% subsidized prices) based on their production and absorptive capacities. He urged the animal breeders to contact the Mesopotamia General Seed Company and the Iraqi Company for Seed Production in their areas receive the quantities allocated to them. The allocations cover all farm animal breeders of sheep and goats (90 kg / head) - twice a year; buffaloes (350 kg / head) - four times a year; cows (250 kg / head) - four times a year; and camels (500 kg / head) once a year only. Originally, the government obtained the barley from farmers at a highly subsidized rate (460,000 IQD per ton).

Other Challenges.

The campaign against the Dubas bug started in late September in five governorate (Karbala, Wasit, Najif, Baghdad and Babil). As of early October 2020, the

¹ Ministry of Agriculture (MOA). <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8596>

² MOA. <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8604>

³ WHO COVID-19 Dashboard. Accessed on October 05, 2020. <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/iq>

⁴ Oil Price Charts. Accessed on October 05, 2020. <https://oilprice.com/oil-price-charts>

⁵ MOA. <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8591>

⁶ MOA. <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8604>

⁷ MOA. <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8600>

⁸ MOA. <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8596>

⁹ Ministry of Trade (MOT). <http://mot.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=5775>

¹⁰ MOT. <http://mot.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=5792>

total infected area across the five governorates is 25,000 donum (2 500 hectares) using land instead of aerial spraying due to unavailability of aircrafts, which will prolong the campaign duration and reduce efficiency.

Campaigns against rodents were completed in Diwanyah and Najaf. However, there were reports on rodents re-appearing in Diwanyah. As of September, a campaign against Red palm Weevil is under way in the Safwan district of Basra.

IV. Food Supply: Markets (farm to market)

The Ministry of Trade (MoT) announced the 8th round of wheat flour distribution of the PDS ration across Iraq. On September 29th MoT confirmed that Public Distribution System (PDS) started to provide its warehouses with the wheat flour, that will be ready to be distributed in the next few weeks to the

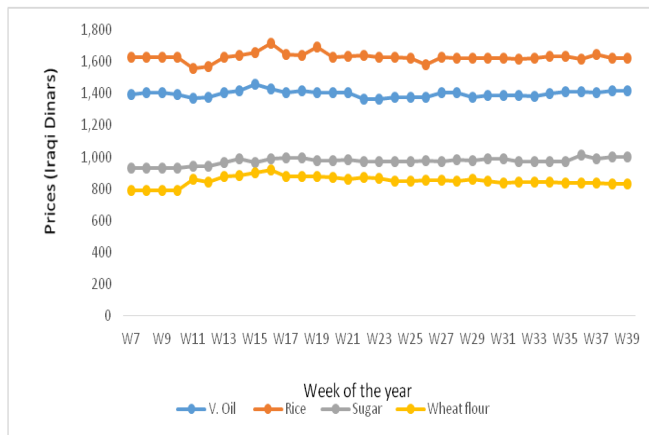


Figure 1. Weekly food prices (national averages) for four staple commodities during the COVID-19 crisis (Source: WFP)

PDS agents in all governorates.¹¹ MoT announced that the General Company for Foodstuff Trade will continue to receive and supply sugar within the ration card items through its sales centers, sites and branches in Baghdad and the governorates.¹²

V. Food Demand (markets to consumers)

Prices. The national average of main food commodities prices did not change noticeably between the period of second and the last week of September. Minor increases were observed, in sugar and vegetable oil prices by 1%, while the rice prices witnessed a slight decrease by -% and wheat flour by 1%. Nevertheless, some governorates still witnessed sharp variations in local prices. Sugar and vegetable oil increased in Duhok by 25% (IQD 1000 to 1250 per kg), while rice prices decreased in Anbar by 25% (IQD 2000 to 1500 per kg), and wheat flour prices by -20% (IQD 500 to 400 per kg) in Muthanna.

The tomato prices among the seasonal vegetables fluctuated the most between the second and last week of September. Half of the Iraqi governorates (9 out of 18) experienced tomato price increases. These price increases peaked to 125% in Muthanna (IQD 333 to 750 per kg), and by 100% in Basrah (IQD 750 to 1500 per kg) and Anbar (IQD 500 to 1000 per kg), whereas the four governorates of Babil, Erbil, Kerbala, and Ninewa witnessed a price increase of around 50%. Potato prices increased by 50% in Muthanna (IQD 500 to 750 per kg) and by 43% in Ninewa (IQD 350 to 500 per kg), but decreased by 25% in Thi-qar (IQD 1000 to 750 per kg). Onion prices, on the other hand, witnessed decrease in almost 5 governorates, and increase in two governorates. The highest decrease were in Maysan by 47% (IQD 750 to 400 per kg), followed by 33% in each of Basrah, Kirkuk, Thi-qar and Wasit (IQD 750 to 500 per kg), while increasing in Ninewa by 43% (IQD 350 to 500 per kg), and by 30% in Babil (IQD 500 to 650 per kg).

Consumption Patterns.

WFPs mVam data collected from September 28th estimated around 3.5 million people with insufficient food consumption. Compared with 14 days earlier, insufficient food consumption increased by approximately half a million. The data revealed that Duhok governorate fell into the moderately high prevalence

of insufficient food consumption category for the first time, with around 22% of the population registering insufficient food consumption. Prevalence of insufficient food consumption steadily increased in Duhok during September, from 5% in the first two weeks, to 11% and 22% in last two weeks. This remarkable change in food consumption may directly be associated with the dramatic increase of almost 60% the daily average number of COVID-19 cases between end of August and end of September from around 190 to 330 cases.

The negative food-based coping strategies, which is calculated based on a

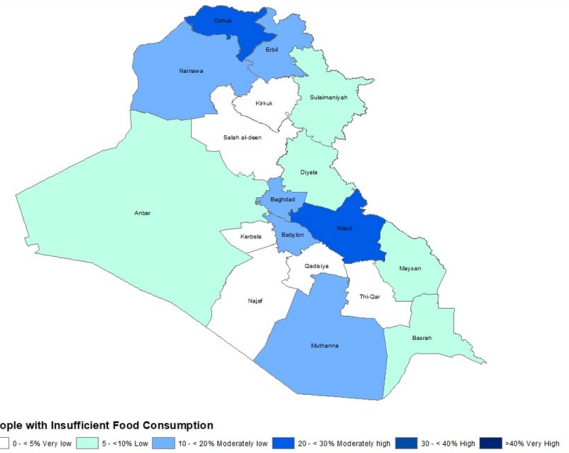


Figure 2. Distribution of people with insufficient food consumption. Where insufficient consumption refers to those with poor and borderline food consumption according to Food Consumption Score (FCS) using a seven-day recall (Source: WFP).

severity score of the reduced coping strategy index (rCSI), increased from 10.7% to 12.6% nationally (from 4.1 to around 4.8 million people respectively) in September, with the largest increases in the Governorates of Duhok (27%), Erbil (26%), and Diyala (24%). Kerbala and Basrah Governorates showed the lowest percentage increases (only 2%) in two weeks. Relying on less expensive food remained a common coping strategy for 34.3% of households - an increase of almost 3% from 31.5%. Almost 15% of the households reported challenges of accessing markets, marking a 1% from the second week of September. Additionally, around 31.8% of households reported challenges accessing health facilities.

VI. Food Supply Chain for Vulnerable Populations

Ongoing Response

Food Security Cluster partners reported the hiring of 200 laborers through cash for work activities to start solar pumping systems in the Ninewah. Individuals selected for this project had seen their sources of livelihood heavily impacted by restrictions in movements to contain the spread of COVID-19.

Similarly, Food Security Cluster partners have distributed 27,000 food baskets to COVID-19 affected families throughout KRG, mainly for the host communities in Akre, Shiladze and the returnees in Sinjar.

¹¹Ministry of Trade. . MoT Official Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/%D9%88%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%AC%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%A9-1611368825806977/>

¹²MoT. <http://mot.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=5786>