



Iraq COVID-19 Food Security Monitor

Issue 15

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Government of Iraq (GoI) Announcements

Date	Government Decision
8 August 2020	The Supreme Committee for National Health and Safety of GoI announced Decision No. 75 and 81 that state: (i) the partial curfew will be extended until 15 August; (ii) all government offices will be open only for 25% of normal working hours and (iii) the decision will be reconsidered after the aforementioned period ends and depending on COVID-19 cases. ¹
8 August 2020	The Ministry of Agriculture announced a new plan to combat desertification, primarily in the central and southern regions of the country. ²

I. Key Messages

- On 3 August, Ministry of Agriculture began an investigation to uncover the cause for mass fish deaths in Al Dimaj marsh in Diwaniah Governorate, with initial results suggesting the fish were exposed to a toxic substance.
- On 3 August, WFP's Hunger Monitoring System found that national food consumption scores improved, with 430,000 fewer people reporting poor or borderline consumption compared to last month.
- The Ministry of Trade announced that sugar and vegetable oil would soon be available through the Public Distribution System again.

II. Overview

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has continued to affect Iraq. As of 11 August, the World Health Organization reported 153,599 cases and 5,464 deaths, a 39.5% increase compared to 27 July.³ The government continues to enforce partial lockdowns and curfew measures in an attempt to curtail transmission, although three international airports reopened for passenger travel in both Iraq and the Kurdistan Region (KRI) on 23 July and 1 August respectively.

The global economic slowdown associated with pandemic containment measures decreased the demand for oil and lowered prices, with consequences for oil exporting countries. In Iraq, oil revenue accounts for 90% of the government budget and developments in oil prices have significant impact on country's finances. Over the past two weeks, Basra light and heavy oil prices have fluctuated between USD 44 and USD 46 per barrel. Compared to prices one year ago, Basra light was about 30% lower while Basrah heavy prices were about 20% lower.⁴ Similar to other OPEC members that increased production in July as the voluntary supply cuts ended, Iraq boosted exports in July, but has pledged to make additional reduction in future months.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 Minister of Agriculture reconfirmed support for the livestock and poultry sector. First, MoA stated that buffalo breeders would receive a one-time distribution of 1,000 tons of barley fodder per breeder, based on the list of registered breeders. The government will also work to decrease the price of barley fodder from IQD 200,000 to IQD 150,000 per ton.⁶ Second, MoA announced new requirements for private sector poultry feed importers. MoA intends to import approximately 250,000 tons of fodder maize and 100,000 tons of soybean meal, and requested a study on the local demand for sorghum and soybean feed.⁷

As of 5 August, MoT confirmed that government silos have received approximately five million tons of wheat across the country, and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) confirmed that the full wheat allocation of 390,000 tons (approximately 16% of production in KRI). Wheat marketing slowed down as the government closed marketing centers; however, some locations remained open, such as locations in Makhmour and Mosul.⁸ The Prime Minister and Minister of Trade traveled to Karbala Governorate separately to visit a metal grain silo under construction. Authorities urged all parties involved to complete the delayed project as soon as possible, in addition to other silos in Nasiriya and Wasit, and stressed the importance of proper grain storage.⁹

The KRI bee keeping association reported that honey production in 2020 might decrease 60% compared to 2019 due to the smaller honey yield caused by farmers' use of low quality pesticides and weather patterns, particularly the high rainfall, fluctuating temperatures and winds dispersing pollen.¹⁰

¹ Government of Iraq. August 8, 2020. Accessed on August 9, 2020. <https://cabinet.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=9693>

² Nas News. August 8, 2020. Accessed on August 9, 2020. <https://www.nasnews.com/view.php?cat=37354>

³ WHO. COVID-19 Dashboard. Accessed on July 28, 2020. <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/iq>

⁴ Oil Price. Accessed on August 9, 2020. <https://oilprice.com/oil-price-charts>

⁵ Lawler, A. Reuters. July 31, 2020. Accessed on August 10, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oil-opece-survey/opece-july-oil-output-surges-as-gulf-voluntary-cuts-end-survey-idUSKCN24W280>

⁶ Ministry of Agriculture. August 7, 2020. Accessed on August 8, 2020. <http://www.zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8534>

⁷ Ministry of Agriculture. August 3, 2020. Accessed on August 10, 2020. <http://www.zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8528>

⁸ Al Maalolah News. July 26, 2020. Accessed on August 7, 2020. <https://www.almaalolah.com/2020/07/26/486838/>

⁹ Ministry of Trade. August 9, 2020. Accessed on August 9, 2020. <http://mot.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=5699>

¹⁰ Rudaw. July 28, 2020. Accessed on August 9, 2020. <https://www.rudaw.net/english/business/28072020>

Other Challenges. On 3 August, a large number of various fish were found dead along a 10km stretch of the Al Dalmaj marsh in Diwaniyah Governorate. The Minister of Agriculture formed a committee and visited the site, accompanied by staff from the Al Diwania Veterinary Hospital. The inspection team did not find any lesions, pests or colour changes on the fish scales, fins, or fins. Autopsies revealed the presence of small hemorrhagic spots on the surface of the liver, suggesting that the fish were exposed to a toxic substance. The committee took fish, water and algae samples to run laboratory tests. The results will help clarify the cause of death, although experts hypothesize that either individuals used electricity or pesticides to fish, nearby factories discharged chemicals or environmental conditions decreased dissolved oxygen levels (dense reeds, high temperatures, reduced water flow, etc.). The MoA confirmed that no viral or bacterial disease caused the deaths and recommended that police patrol the estuary to prevent any illegal dumping.¹¹

The Plant Protection Department continued control campaigns against Red Palm Weevil in Safwan district and rodents in Diwania and Najaf Governorates.

V. Food Demand (markets to consumers)

Prices. The national price averages of staple food commodities remained stable during the first week of August compared with the last week in July, with a slight decrease in sugar prices (-2%). This reduction was more evident at the governorate level; the price of sugar decreased 25% in Thi Qar (IQD 1,000 to 750 per kg) and -4% in Sulaimaniyah (IQD 1,150 to 1,100 per kg). The national average of rice remained unaffected, but the prices decreased in Sulaimaniyah and Duhok by -4% and -3% respectively. Similarly, price of wheat flour remained stable at the national level; however, prices in Kirkuk increased by 6% (IQD 800 to 900 per kg).

The fluctuation of the seasonal vegetables prices continued, with changes reported between the first week of August and last week of July. At the national level, the average price of tomatoes increased by 13%. This change was due to price changes only in Ninewa and Kirkuk, where the prices increased 100% (IQD 250 to 500 per kg) and by 50% (IQD 333 to 500 per kg) respectively. The national average price of potatoes witnessed a 9% increase. In Anbar and Thi Qar, potato prices rose by 50% (IQD 500 to 750 per kg) and in Ninewa by 43%. Potato prices decreased in Kirkuk by 33% (IQD 500 to 333 per kg). Average onion prices experienced a 15% increase at the national level, primarily due to changes in Ninewa (IQD 250 to 500 per kg), Anbar, Duhok and Salah Al Din (IQD 500 to 750

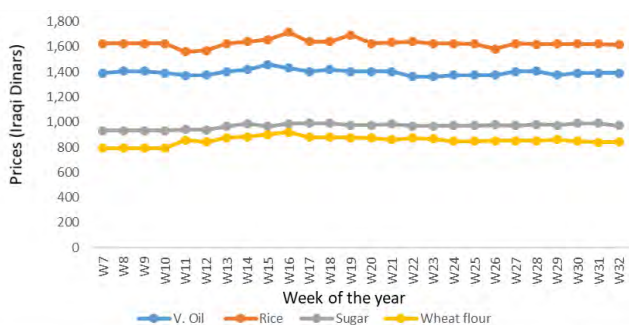


Figure 1. Weekly food prices (national averages) for four staple commodities during the COVID-19 crisis (Source: WFP).

per kg). On the other hand, onion prices did decrease in Kirkuk by 47% (IQD 625 to 333 per kg) and Sulaimaniyah by 25% (IQD 1000 to 750 per kg).

Consumption Patterns. On 3 August, the WFP Hunger Monitoring System estimated that about 2.7 million people had insufficient food consumption. Compared with a month ago, this was a decrease of 430,000 people. Compared to the last week of July, the number of people using negative food-based coping strategies declined by 120,000. Only approximately 13.8% of respondents reported adopting negative coping strategies, representing 5.3 million people. This is calculated based on a standard food based Coping Strategy Index (rCSI). Relying on less expensive food remained the most common coping strategy, with 28.6% households reporting adopting it. All estimates were based on a statistically significant sample where 1,620 households, interviewed over the telephone.



Figure 2. Number 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).

Market access improved by 3.4% compared to the last week of July, with 28.1% of respondents reporting issues accessing the market (approximately 1.7 million people). Of those respondents, 68.7% (0.83 million people) stated that movement restrictions were the primary challenge to reaching the market. The number of households facing difficulties accessing health facilities increased 0.02 million compared to 27 July, with 44.6% of those households reporting the movement restrictions as the main challenge.

VI. Food Supply Chain for Vulnerable Populations

Ongoing Response. The Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) distributed more than a 250,000 relief packages to internally displaced people in July, including food baskets (104,551), health baskets (118,636), clothes (19,421) and floor mattresses (7,593) in various governorates.¹²

At the end of July, mills began receiving the sixth batch of wheat, with the flour destined for the Public Distribution System (PDS).¹³ The MoT announced that sugar and vegetable oil would soon be available through the PDS again thanks to the Ministry of Finance developing a dedicated fund for PDS. The MoT started to contract local companies and factories to procure the commodities.¹⁴

UN/NGO Response. Households in camp quarantine and isolation (Q/I) will receive their monthly rations from WFP, distributed in coordination with MoMD. WFP will also provide immediate response rations (IRR) to individuals and households in Q/I, in addition to those who are self-isolated in camps lacking Q/I facilities.

¹¹ Ministry of Agriculture. August 2, 2020. Accessed on August 4, 2020. <http://www.zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8527>

¹² Ministry of Migration and Displacement. August 4, 2020. Accessed on August 8, 2020. <https://momd.gov.iq/Posts/Article?id=7670>

¹³ Ministry of Trade. August 3, 2020. Accessed on August 9, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2707624736181375&id=1611368825806977&_tn=-R.

¹⁴ Ministry of Trade. August 8, 2020. Accessed on August 9, 2020. <http://facebook.com/pages/category/Government-organization>