



Iraq Covid-19 Food Security Monitor

Bi-weekly Update Issue 22 16 November 2020

Government Decisions

16 November 2020

The Cabinet has agreed to allocate around \$1.6 Billion USD in its 2021 budget for the agriculture sector to pay the upcoming wheat and barley marketing season (summer 2021) and support farmers with subsidized seeds and machinery (autumn 2021).¹

I. Key Messages

- WFP's mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Monitoring system (mVAM) data collected on 15th of November estimated that around 3.0 million people in Iraq were with insufficient food consumption, a decrease of around 200,000 in comparison to the beginning of the month. The highest percentages of insufficient food consumption that were found in the governorates of Ninewa (19%), Anbar and Diyala (15%), Kirkuk (14%), and Baghdad (10%).

- MOA is exploring ways to open the hiring process for the employment of agricultural engineers and veterinarians through amending Law 24. This will help MOA renew its cadre of professional staff and will contribute to the employment of full-time agricultural engineers and veterinarians, as well as graduates of preparatory and agricultural colleges. MOA is also exploring granting young graduates with loans and the right to establish manufacturing and food industries.

- MoA issued an updated list of foodstuffs banned from import according to the agricultural calendar, including the majority of agricultural crops currently produced or harvested in the country: dates, table eggs, live chickens, tomatoes, frozen sea and river fish, honey, green peas, melon, watermelon.

II. Overview

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has continued to spread in Iraq. As of 16 November, the World Health Organization reported 521,542 confirmed cases and 11,712 deaths; roughly a 7% and 5% increase respectively over the preceding two weeks.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the diminishing oil revenues have affected various dimensions of Iraq's vulnerability. Oil prices experienced an unprecedented fall in early 2020, followed by a modest recovery later in the year. Over the first two weeks of November, Basra heavy oil prices fluctuated between USD 36.81 and USD 40.68 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.²

Social unrest in Baghdad and in various cities in the southern governorates of Iraq since October have been driven by high levels of unemployment which preceded the COVID-19 pandemic. While government employment in general has been almost in freeze since 2015, the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) is exploring ways to open the hiring process for the employment of agricultural engineers and veterinarians through amending Law 24. This will help MOA renew its cadre of professional staff and will contribute to the employment of full-time agricultural engineers and veterinarians, as well as graduates of preparatory and agricultural colleges. MOA is also exploring granting young graduates with loans and the right to establish manufacturing and food industries.

1 zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8701
 2 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8673>
 3 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8701>
 4 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8672>
 5 <http://vetsc.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1416>
 6 <http://mot.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=5905>
 7 <http://mot.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=5896>

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. MoA is continuing its assistance to rice farmers to support harvesting and marketing activities, and is coordinating with the Ministry of Trade (MoT) to facilitate the reception of marketed rice quantities under the PDS. Additionally, MoA has recently received the approval of the Council of Ministers to allocate an amount of two (2) trillion Iraqi Dinars to the benefit of the agricultural sector. These allocations will be distributed to farmers as dues to cover their agricultural requirements in terms of inputs for the upcoming season (2020-21 season). MoA is also planning to supply farmers with other agricultural services such as mechanization and necessary extension services.³

MoA continues its support to combat desertification and prevent desert encroachment. Current areas affected by desertification amounts to 94 million dunoms of land (equivalent to 9.4 million hectares)- which raises the overall percentage of arable land affected by desertification in Iraq to 53%. MoA is establishing desert oases in different governorates using ground water and cultivation, in addition to provision of drinking and irrigation water, animal grazing, increasing green pastures, as well as establishing rare and endangered plants fields to support the genetic bank for plant heritage. At the same time, and its continuous efforts to tackle climate change, MoA has implemented several afforestation campaigns under the title "afforestation campaigns for green Iraq", these campaign covers Baghdad and all Iraqi governorates aiming to plant 2 million trees.⁴

Other Challenges. The Veterinary Departments of MoA in the governorates of Anbar, Salah al-Din, Babil and few areas in Baghdad recorded several cases of koi herpes virus in fish. MoA issued a number of necessary health measures to control the disease including the use of specialized free of charge sterilizers, provision of awareness and guidance seminars to fish breeders (integrated media coverage) in addition to giving instructions to fish growers to register new meals and follow up on the health status.⁵

IV. Food Supply: Markets (farm to market)

The Ministry of Trade (MoT) declared that the State Company for Fairs and Commercial Services of Iraq granted 7,204 miscellaneous import (food and non-food) licenses during the month of November, including 794 agriculture item import licenses.⁶

MoT contracted national suppliers to supply 40,000 tons of sugar and 36,000 tons of cooking oil for the ration card following few months of suspension due to financial limitations. These allocations were approved by the Ministry of Finance.⁷

V. Food Demand (markets to consumers)

Prices. Compared to the last week of October, national average prices of basic food commodities remained relatively stable during the first two weeks of November. On average, all four commodities witnessed a slight decrease. The highest decreases were for sugar by 3% followed by 2% for wheat flour, and only 1% decrease in rice and vegetable oil prices. These decreases in the week-to-week prices were mainly driven by changes in Duhok, Thi-Qar and Kirkuk governorates. In Duhok, sugar prices decreased 33% (IQD 1,500 to 1,000 per kg), and wheat flour witnessed 20% decrease (IQD 1,250 to 1,000 per kg), while rice prices decreased only by 14% (IQD 1,750 to 1,500 IQD). The price of wheat flour also decreased slightly in Sulaimaniyah and Wasit by 6% and 9% respectively. While vegetable oil decreased by 17% in Kirkuk (IQD 1,500 to 1,250 IQD), and in Thi-qar by 14% (IQD 1,750 to 1,500 IQD).

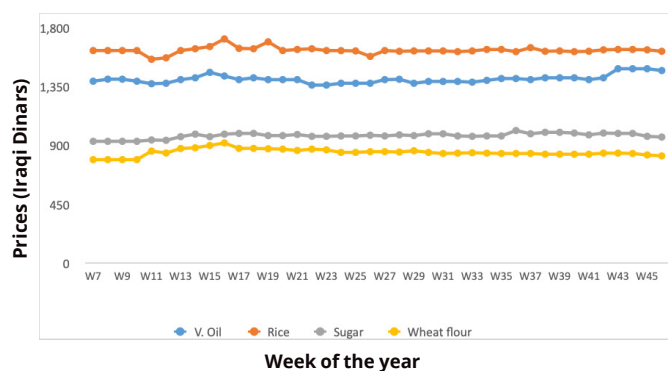


Figure 1. Weekly food prices (national averages) for four staple commodities during the COVID-19 crisis.

Consumption Patterns. WFP's mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Monitoring System (mVAM) data collected on 15th of November estimated that around 3.0 million people in Iraq with insufficient food consumption, a decrease of around 200,000 in comparison to the beginning of the month, as the poverty rate increased from 20% to 30% of the population because of the pandemic according to the Ministry of Planning. The highest percentages of insufficient food consumption that were in the governorates of Ninewa (19%), Anbar and Diyala (15%), Kirkuk (14%), and Baghdad (10%). During the same period (2 to 15 November), households with high score of food based coping strategy (negative coping strategy) increased from 8.9% to 9.8%. The common coping strategy was relying on less expensive food, with 30.7% households reporting adopting it, a continuation from the first week of November. Households reporting issues with accessing the markets remained stable at 12%, while households with concerns of going out to 12.0% reported issues accessing the markets, while concerns of going out because of the COVID-19 outbreak as one the top barriers to accessing markets dropped from 3.0% to 2.5%.

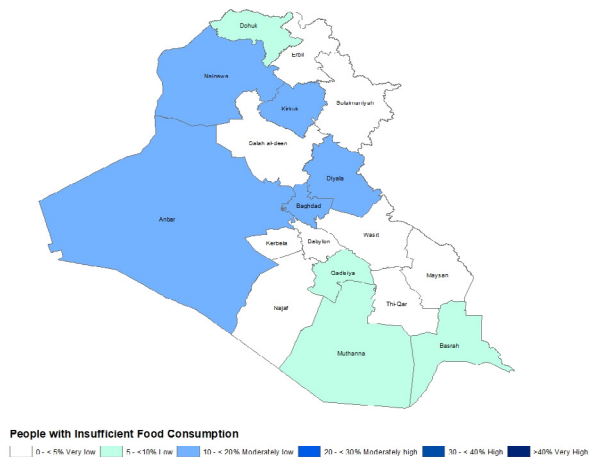


Figure 2. Distribution of people with insufficient food consumption. Where insufficient consumption refers to those with poor and borderline food consumption according to Food Consumption Score (FCS) using a seven-day recall (Source: WFP).

VI. Food Supply Chain for Vulnerable Populations

MoT has announced the distribution of vegetable oil commodity and wheat grains. On November 16th, the MoT has started the process of supplying the PDS agents with the locally produced vegetable oil commodity in the nine governorates of; Baghdad, Mosul, Basra, Maysan, Diwaniyah, Diyala, Muthanna, Wasit and Anbar. In addition, the 9th distribution cycle of wheat grains started in Salah al-Din, Muthanna, Diyala, Babil, Ninewa, Thi-qar, Maysan, Wasit and Najaf.⁸

As part of the COVID-19 response, Food Security Cluster (FSC) partners provided emergency Cash-for-Work assistance to 1,930 host community families in Wasit and Thi Qar Governorates In Ninewa and Erbil, partners provided in-kind assistance, agricultural inputs, animal health inputs as well animal feed to 440 returnee and host community families.