



Iraq Covid-19 Food Security Monitor

Bi-weekly Update Issue 24 14 December 2020

Government Decisions

13 December 2020

Iraq marketed over 110,000 tons of local rice through the Public Distribution System (PDS) as part of its marketing campaign for rice for the year 2020.

14 December 2020

MoA has lifted its ban after the summer harvest on inter-governorate movement and trade of maize crops in order to facilitate the supply of fodder to southern governorates.

I. Key Messages

- Iraq, Jordan and Egypt are negotiating expanding cooperation on various issues including agriculture. The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in Iraq is developing collaboration in the areas of research and in the exchange of expertise, as well as exploring potential export opportunities.

- In the effort to increase agriculture exports, MoA has been working on facilitating exports of strategic and cash crops into neighboring countries including Iran and Saudi Arabia.

- As part of the overall government effort to focus on the development of southern governorates, MoA has been working on increasing farmer support in the southern governorates of Thi Qar, Diwaniyah, Misan and Al Muthana, including the increase in seed and fertilizer distributions.

- Prices of main food commodities remained largely stable, with slight reduction in insufficient food consumption among Iraqi households.

II. Overview

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has continued to spread in Iraq. As of 14 December, the World Health Organization reported 575,972 confirmed cases and 12,603 deaths; roughly a 4.6% and 3% increase respectively over the preceding two weeks.¹

The impact of outbreak of coronavirus and economic slowdown resulting from measures introduced to contain the spread of the pandemic has resulted in suppressing international crude oil prices; Iraq has experienced a direct negative effect on the gross domestic product. Oil prices experienced an unprecedented fall in early 2020, followed by a modest recovery starting since November. Over the past two weeks, Basra heavy oil prices fluctuated between USD 44.55 and USD 47.27 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

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. Under the overall framework of cooperation between Iraq, Egypt and Jordan, MoA is working on a joint protocol between the Ministries of Agriculture in the respective countries to develop cooperation and exchange of agricultural expertise in 2021 in the areas of seeds varieties advancements, highly productive climate tolerant hybrids in addition to cooperation in the field of date tissue culture and management of fruit nurseries. Collaboration will also cover the Egyptian experience in fruit cultivation in the deserts, combating desertification, use of clean energy in agricultural fields and modern irrigation techniques.³

Iraq is progressing on formalizing its cooperation with neighboring countries. To this end, MoA has been developing agricultural cooperation and trade exchange for various crops and agricultural products to Iran, including the export of surplus production of local barley in 2020. Iran and Iraq are in the process of completing technical aspects of exports including quality standards (including packaging and purity), which could see up to 700,000 tons of barley exported.⁴ During December, MoA has also granted the approval for the export of 250 tons of surplus tomato production to Saudi Arabia through the private sector.⁵

Following the government's decision to focus on the development challenges facing southern governorates, namely Thi Qar, Diwaniya, Misan, Muthana, the MoA has been shoring up its interventions in these respective governorates. MoA has approved the plans for distributing rice seeds for the upcoming planting seasons in addition to the distribution of 40kg per donum for certified wheat seeds for central and southern governorates by end of 2020.⁶ In December, MoA has transferred payments to barley producers in Nasiriyah, Thi Qar.⁷

MoA is also increasing the fertilizer distribution rations to farmers under the current agricultural plan in Thi Qar from 25 kg to 35 kg per donum. MoA will also increase urea fertilizers distribution from 40 kg to 60 per donum and DAP fertilizers by 5 kg per donum and 10 kg of urea per donum for farmers in semi-rain-fed areas. MoA will also increase the fertilizer distribution for seed producers from 40 kg to 65 per donum, and will work on increasing water quotas in coordination with the Ministry of Water Resources.⁸ Additionally, the ministry has initiated a free vaccination campaign for buffaloes and cows against hemorrhagic infections and sheep and goats against the foot and mouth disease in Nasirya governorate.⁹

In line with general development goals for southern governorates, MoA is preparing to carry out an afforestation campaign in Thi Qar Governorate due to begin in 2021, which will include palm tree seedlings, fruit trees and olives and will cover all districts in an effort to support farmers and nurseries owners and provide job opportunities to the local community. This initiative is planned to enhance livelihoods and at the same time increase green areas in the governorate.¹⁰

¹ <https://dataviz.vam.wfp.org/Hunger-Analytics-Hub>

² <https://oilprice.com/oil-price-charts/s>

³ <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8760>

⁴ <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8773>

⁵ <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8772>

⁶ <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8763>

⁷ <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8771>

⁸ <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8759>

⁹ <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8764>

¹⁰ <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8771>

This follows an extensive consultation by the Minister of Agriculture with local stakeholders to better understand needs and better address them. Another example of this is when the Minister has been meeting with farmer groups, livestock breeders and investors in Al-Diwaniyah, to explore where the State Company for Agricultural Supplies and the Agricultural Extension and Training Department, can play a role in supplying agricultural machinery and equipment, plant and animal products. While it remains unclear how the government will fund new employment of agriculture engineers and veterinarians with MoA, the ministry has been encouraging new graduates to remain engaged in the agriculture sector in hopes that new government employment would be soon possible.¹¹

IV. Food Supply: Markets (farm to market)

The Ministry of Trade (MoT) through its State Company for Grain Trade is distributing locally produced wheat to mill branches in Rifai, Nasiriyah, Kirkuk, Anbar, Najaf and Diwaniyah as part of Public Distribution System (PDS) 9th distribution cycle for 2020.¹² MoT is initiating the preparation for its 10th distribution of wheat flour for 2020 under PDS, with updated beneficiary lists shared with local PDS distributors. Additionally, MoT will also be distributing sugar and vegetable oil rations under PDS, which have been lagging behind due to budgetary difficulties. Due to the economic crisis in Iraq, the PDS has fallen behind in its distribution of different commodities and in different governorates.¹³

As of December 13, MoT has received over 110,000 ton of locally produced rice as part of its national marketing campaign for 2020.¹⁴ On the other hand MoA has lifted its ban on inter-governorate movement and trade of maize crops in order to facilitate the supply of poultry producers in the south with maize for fodder.¹⁵

V. Food Demand (markets to consumers)

Prices. Compared with the last week of November, no significant weekly changes were observed in the price of basic food commodities. The national average price of rice, sugar and wheat flour prices remained stable, but the price of vegetable oil witnessed a slight 4% increase (from IQD 1458 to 1514 per liter). The main drivers of the increase in vegetable oil prices were the changes in Dohuk, where prices rose by 40% (IQD 1,250 to 1,750 IQD liter), and in Kirkuk where prices rose by 20% (from IQD 1,250 to 1500 per liter) and in Najaf where prices increased by 17% (from IQD 1,500 to 1750 per liter). Sugar prices remained almost stable between IQD 950 and 958 per kg, price reductions in Kirkuk and Sulaimaniyah (12% and 4% respectively).

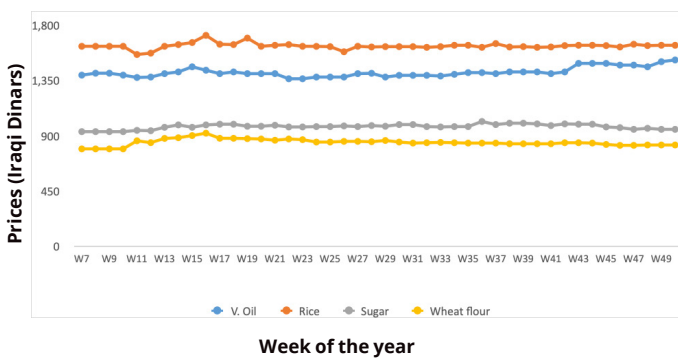


Figure 1. Weekly food prices (national averages) for four staple commodities during the COVID-19 crisis (Source: WFP)

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 14 <http://mot.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=5993>
 15 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8789>

Consumption Patterns. WFPs latest mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping system (mVAM) has recorded that by 15 December around 6% of households, representing 2.4 million people in Iraq, did not have sufficient food consumption. This was a further reduction of approximately 0.2 million people compared to the last week of November. Only four governorates continued to have people with moderate-low insufficient food consumption, with Anbar registering 12% of the population with moderate-low insufficient food consumption, followed by Diyala at 14%, Kirkuk at 15% and Ninewa at 17%

Data from mVAM showed that 11% people reporting the adoption of negative food-based coping strategies. The most common strategies employed were “relying on less expensive food” and “borrowing food” at around 34% and 28% of respondents respectively. Compared to the second half of November, households that reported challenges accessing markets remained the same at around 12.1. Only a few 1.1% of those households (roughly 0.42 million people) reported that concern of outbreak were the primary issue.

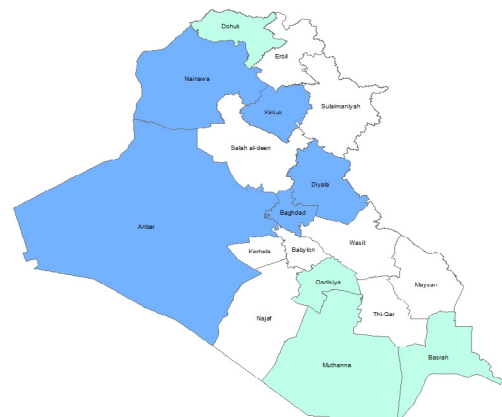


Figure 2. Distribution of people with insufficient food consumption. Where insufficient consumption refers to those with poor and borderline food consumption according to Food Consumption Score (FCS) using a seven-day recall (Source: WFP)

Legend for Figure 2: 0 - < 5% Very low, 5 - < 10% Low, 10 - < 20% Moderately low, 20 - < 30% Moderately high, 30 - < 40% High, > 40% Very High