



Iraq Covid-19 Food Security Monitor

Bi-weekly Update Issue 26 19 January 2021

Government Decisions

14 January 2021

Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) has mandated that all maize produced and marketed to the government be used as subsidized feed for poultry producers, as part of the government support to the sector.¹

19 January 2021

The Council of Ministers has approved the amendment of Law 24 of 2013 that regulates fulltime engagement in farming activities. The amendment will allow citizens engaged in fulltime farming the right to own agricultural land property under cultivation at no cost, the opportunity to participate in government contracting through direct selection without participation in public auctions, the inclusion of farmers in the retirement law, and the ability of transferring ownership of agricultural land to the heirs.²

I. Key Messages

- As part of its economic reforms under the White Paper, the government of Iraq (GoI) through the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) has embarked on major economic reforms in the agri-food sector with the aim of increasing agricultural production and participation in the agriculture sector, and growing the agricultural economy through increased private sector participation and agri-food exports.

- MoA has already embarked on land reforms that include greater ownership of agricultural land. MoA, together with the Ministry of Trade (MoT), has been also increasing its support for exporting agricultural production, including fast-tracked export licensing and infrastructure investments to facilitate aggregation, especially in southern governorates.

- Food prices have stabilized post currency devaluation, with prices of major commodities such as flour, sugar, cooking oil and rice remaining stable. While 6.5% of Iraqi households remain with insufficient food consumption, WFP has registered a decrease in households with insufficient consumption during this reporting period.

II. Overview

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has continued to spread in Iraq. As of 19 January 2021, the World Health Organization reported 609,852 confirmed cases and 12,962 deaths, a 1.6% and 0.7% increase since the beginning of the month³. This percentage is an increase over the previous report, i.e. for the first two weeks of January 2021.

Responding to measures introduced to contain the spread of COVID-19 globally, economic activities showed down and resulted in decreasing international oil prices. Despite a modest recovery in oil prices, Iraq, relying on hydrocarbons as the main source of income, experienced a direct negative impact on the gross domestic product. Over the first half of January, Basra heavy oil prices fluctuated between USD 48.58 and USD 54.01 per barrel.

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 (MoA) announced on 17 January the finalization of the comprehensive strategy for the advancement of the date palm sector.

1 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8876>

2 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8887>

3 <https://dataviz.yam.wfp.org/Hunger-Analytics-Hub>

4 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8884>

5 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8871>

6 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8859>

7 <http://mot.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=6109>

8 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8875>

9 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8865>

10 (<http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8878>)

According to the Central Statistics Office of the Ministry of Planning, date production on Iraq for 2019 was estimated at around 639,000 tons with an average of 59.7kg production per tree. Baghdad was in the lead with 21.1% of overall production, followed by Babel with 14.6% of the total production and Karbala with 7.12%.⁴

MOA and the Ministry of Water Resources inaugurated the new Mansouriyah Al-Shat water pumping station in Diyala Governorate. The pumping station serves 6,000 dunoms of agriculture land in Habhab sub district in Alkhales district.⁵

MoA released the last outstanding financial dues to farmers who marketed yellow corn in the 2019-20 marketing season through the Mesopotamia Seed Company. The General Company for Grain Trade continued to disburse financial dues to farmers who marketed wheat in the 2020 season in Anbar, Salah Al Din, Karbala, Babil and Diyala.⁶

Quantities of rice marketed since September 2020 to date reached 255,607 tons – out of which 199,662 tons of the Jasmine variety and 55,945 tons of the Amber variety – an increase of 130,011 tons from last year's production of 125,596 tons. The rice crop production was estimated at (574.7) thousand tons for the summer season of 2019. The total area cultivated with the rice crop was estimated at (511.4) thousand dunoms for the year 2019, with an increase of (489.7) thousand dunoms compared to the last season, which was estimated (21.7) thousand dunoms.⁷ The 2019/2020 agricultural season was characterized by increased irrigation availability due to increased rainfall, which encouraged farmers to grow rice and contributed to the bumper crop.

To support the afforestation campaigns in the capital Baghdad in an effort to mitigate desertification and dust storms, MoA is providing seedlings to the Baghdad Governorate with a variety of trees including date palm and olive trees.⁸

The MoA in Baghdad and the Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources (MoAWR) in Kurdistan Region agreed to strengthen cooperation to protect national poultry sector from smuggled good by tightening procedures at border crossings and government control check points. The two ministries also agreed to take necessary steps to support the agricultural sector, provide necessary assistance to farmers, protect local production and encourage the investment in the private sector.⁹

Other Challenges. The veterinary department in MoA has been working on containing an outbreak of H5N8 Bird Flu in Salah Al Din Governorate. MoA started a sterilization campaigns in poultry farms, and culled around 50,000 chickens during January. The Veterinary Department is also conducting a survey around infected area to assess the situation and detect additional cases. Owners of poultry farms around the area were alerted to take necessary precautions. Furthermore, MoA called upon security services at border crossings and customs to be fully alert for cross-boundary diseases, and prevent the entry of live or frozen chicken from neighboring countries where the disease has already spread.¹⁰

IV. Food Supply: Markets (farm to market)

The Ministry of Trade (MoT) through its General Company for Grain Trade supplied flour mills with additional quantities of wheat under the Public Distribution System (PDS). Flour mills in Thi Qar received 595,240 tons, while mills in Missan received 1,255 tons, mills in Salah AlDin 900 tons, and mills in Anbar 1,450 tons.¹¹

The MoT reported that it had granted 74 export licenses to 17 countries to Iraqi traders during December only through the State Company for Iraqi Fairs and Commercial Services, to a number of countries including UAE, Malaysia, India, Azerbaijan, Russia, KSA, Libya, Britain, Italy, Lebanon, America, Jordan, Syria, Qatar, Egypt, Turkey and Germany. The licenses included authorizations to export dates, tomatoes, eggplants, tahine and molasses among others.¹²

MOA is planning to establish marketing centers in southern governorates to support the export supply chain for tomato and other vegetable crops. The centers will include modern warehouses and cold chain storage, and supplied with refrigerated transportation to facilitate inland transportation. This effort is part of the government's overall effort to support the agri-food sector and increase agri-food exports.¹³

V. Food Demand (markets to consumers)

Prices. Compared with the first week of January, no significant weekly changes were observed in the prices of basic food commodities. The national average price of vegetable oil and rice prices remained stable, but the price of sugar and wheat flour witnessed a slight decrease of 3% (IQD 1858 to 1803 per kg) and 4% (IQD 991 to 949 per kg) respectively. The main drivers of the decrease in sugar prices were the changes in Ninewa, where prices dropped by 20% (IQD 1,250 to 1,000 IQD per kg), while the decreases in wheat flour prices were driven by the 20% decrease in Kirkuk and Misan (IQD 1250 to 1000 per kg), and 25% decrease in Ninewa (IQD 1000 to 750 per kg).

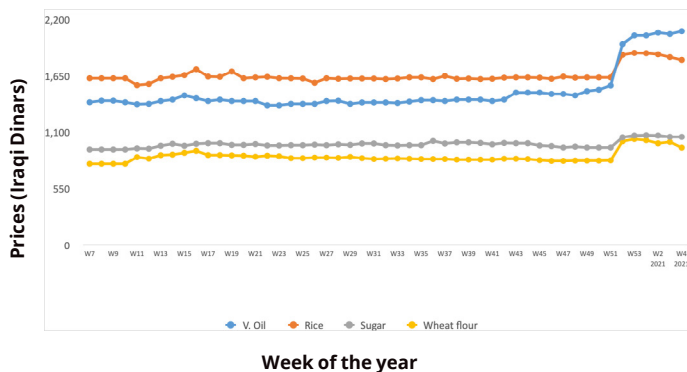


Figure 1. Weekly food prices (national averages) for four staple commodities during the COVID-19 crisis (Source: WFP)

Consumption Patterns. According to WFP Hunger Monitoring System data, 6.5% of households, representing around 2.5 million people in Iraq, did not have sufficient food consumption during the reporting period. This was a significant decrease of approximately 0.64 million people compared to the second week of January¹⁴. The most significant drops in number of people with insufficient food consumption were in; Diyala from 17% to 6%, Kirkuk from 12% to 4% and Ninewa from 13% to 8%. However, unexpected increases in food insecure households were reported in Babil from 24% to 33%.

Additionally, 10.3% of surveyed households reported adopting negative food-based coping strategies. The most common strategy was 'relying on less expensive food' with 35.8% of those using coping strategies employing this strategy.

Compared to the second week of January, households who reported challenges accessing markets remained at 14.7%. Moreover, 14% of those households (roughly 0.54 million people) reported that lack of money was the primary issue. On the other hand, households facing difficulties accessing health facilities increased slightly, from 28.6% to 29.6%.

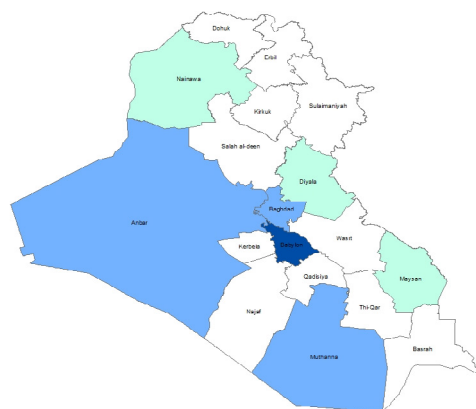


Figure 2. Distribution of people with insufficient food consumption. Where insufficient consumption refers to those with poor and borderline food consumption according to Food Consumption Score (FCS) using a seven-day recall (Source: WFP).

11 <http://mot.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=6121>
 12 https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=1611368825806977&story_fbid=2848492418761272
 13 <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8874>
 14 The estimates were based on a statistically significant sample of 1,620 people interviewed.