



PRESS RELEASE ON THE AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD OUTLOOK 2013 / 2014 IN SAHEL AND IN WEST AFRICA

Agro-meteorological conditions conducive to average to good agro-pastoral production despite a late planting of crops

The regional consultation of the regional information system for Food Crisis Prevention and Management (PREGEC) in the Sahel and West Africa on the agricultural and food outlook was held from 17 to 19 September 2013 in Niamey, Niger. At the end of this consultation, the regional food and nutrition security information systems have made the following observations:

Marked by a late onset of rains, the agro-pastoral season is characterized by low and erratic rainfall from May to mid-July. A significant upturn of rainfall was observed from mid-July and intensified in August, causing flooding in some places. Globally, the rains collected have been fairly well distributed in time and space since August. Even if the seasonal totals are generally lower than those of last year (exceptionally rainy), they are higher than the 1971-2000 average.

On the hydrological level, water flow rates and volumes in the various watercourses started developing slowly. Since July, they have reached levels close to those of last year and higher than average. The filling level of dams is progressing normally; which portends good availability of water for off-season agricultural production.

As a consequence of the rainfall and hydrological outlook, sowing activities generally suffered delays and replanting were observed in June and July and in some places in August. From the end of July, the crops benefited from fairly good water conditions and provision of inputs for their vegetative growth and development. Most crops are in reproduction and maturation phases. Only late planting are currently in vegetative growth phases and need water intake until October 2013. Expected yields will be equivalent to above the 1971-2000 average and lower in some areas of northern Senegal, the regions of Tillaberi, Tahoua and eastern Zinder in Niger, the Wilaya of Gorgol and Guidimakha, in Mauritania and the Lake and Biltine regions, in Chad. Locally, rice yields will be affected by the floods in northern Benin, the River area in Niger and in the Gambia.

The pest situation is generally calm. However, the threat posed by locusts and grain-eating birds to the crops will persist throughout the rest of the season, particularly in the frontline countries (Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad).

Despite a difficult start in terms of emergence and growth of pasture, a significant improvement was observed starting from July in almost all agro-pastoral zones. In the Sahel strip, the biomass levels are equivalent to higher than those of last year and the 1982-2012 average, but low in northern Senegal, the Wilayas of Gorgol and Guidimakha, in some places at Diffa, in Niger and in the Chadian Sahel. The body condition of the animals is satisfactory.

According to mid-term estimates, the total cereal production expected in the Sahel and West Africa could reach 58, 460, 000 metric tonnes if the current look of the season were maintained and if rains continue to fall until October 2013. In this case scenario, crop production in this season would increase by 7% compared to the 2012-2013 cropping season. But, in the case of an early cessation of rains, particularly in the eastern Sahel, the cereal production of the area would be estimated at 53 million metric tonnes, representing a 3% decrease compared to the previous season.

The market situation is characterized by a good supply of the major basins although the pace and volume of trade flows are low in some places, like in Nigeria. However, a lot of harassment is observed along the main roads. Maize, which contributes significantly to food security in the region is the most affected value chain.

From October 2012 to June 2013, prices have remained higher than their level in last year and the five-year average. However, since mid-August 2013, following the good resumption of rains, commercial stocks have been taken to the market. With the introduction of new crops (maize, groundnuts and cowpea) on the markets, seasonal price decrease has been observed across the region and moderately in Benin and more pronounced in Nigeria. This price fall will become more pronounced from east to west, as new cereals come to the markets.

The extension of the lean period due to the delayed onset of the rainy season and the impacts of flooding in some places could increase the prevalence of acute global malnutrition among children under five years of age. The major aggravating factors are : malaria infection, diarrhoea, acute respiratory infections.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, it is recommended that:

- ✓ Regional information systems (CILSS, FEWS NET, PAM, FAO):
 - Continue the strategic watch over flood monitoring.
 - Continue the watch over the functioning of markets and domestic and cross-border trade flows to timely detect malfunctions.

- ✓ States:
 - Support recessional production and livestock programmes to enhance the resilience of food insecure people.
 - Keep the watch over insect pests, particularly desert locusts.
 - Continue actions for preventing and treating malnutrition

Done in Niamey, on 19 September 2013