

## WEST AFRICA Food Security Alert

September 30, 2011

### *Regional cereal production average; localized deficits in the Sahel*

Early seasonal forecasts for average to above-average rainfall in West Africa have not materialized, and June/July rains were poorly distributed in time and space. However, well distributed rainfall in August allowed sowing to be completed and crops under water stress to continue their development normally. Overall, agricultural and pastoral production are likely to be near average, though some areas of below-average production exist. In the Sahel in particular, cereal production will generally be average, with areas of significantly below average production in parts of Chad, western Niger, the extreme north of Nigeria, western Mali, and Mauritania (Figure 1).

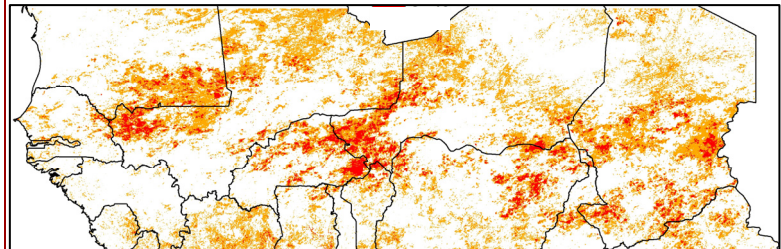
Short-term forecasts indicate that rains are likely to continue in the Sahel at least through the end of September, the normal end of the season. Therefore, in the most-likely scenario crop production in the region will be less than last year's bumper harvest (59 million tons) but near the 2005/06-2009/10 average (~50 million tons)\*. In the best case scenario, rainfall would continue through the first dekad of October, and late-sown crops will have time to mature more fully, slightly increasing regional production. However, because medium term forecasts since July have suggested average rainfall between August and November, it is unlikely that rains will continue as needed.

The impact of the unequal distribution of agricultural production is not yet clear. In addition, FEWS NET's analysis of global markets suggests that the price of imported rice, which is important to the diets of poor households in coastal and urban areas, is likely to increase. Maize prices on the international market will also likely remain high due to high demand from agro-industry. Credit access constraints may limit capacity of Sahelian and West African countries that rely heavily on cereal imports to import normal quantities.

However, several factors are expected to mitigate the impacts of localized production deficits and high international food prices on food security. First, following the poor start of season, large areas were switched from long-cycle to short cycle crops such as cowpea, tubers, watermelons, melons. The crops are performing well and will contribute to household income (through sales). Second, many producers and even governments (e.g., Niger) are preparing earlier than usual to invest in off-season cropping. Third, record 2010/11 harvests have led to unusually high carryover stocks among producers and traders in most countries, especially in the Sahel. These carryover stocks mean that household and market cereal supplies will be greater than production alone would suggest, implying that food access will remain near average in spite of any potential cereal price increase.

For now, FEWS NET expects the food assistance needs for the 2011/12 consumption year to be generally average in the region but concentrated in areas where agricultural or pastoral production will be below average, including parts of Chad, western Niger, the extreme north of Nigeria, western Mali, and Mauritania. FEWS NET and its partners will complete assessments of agricultural production levels and carryover stocks in October. FEWS NET will publish national Food Security Outlooks in October for the October 2011 to March 2012 period.

**Figure 1.** Number of dekads between June 1 and September 10, 2011 during which the Vegetation Condition Index was less than 20 percent of the maximum



■ 5-7 dekads <20 percent of maximum  
■ 8-10 dekads <20 percent of maximum

Note: The Vegetation Condition Index is an indicator of the relative vigor of the vegetation in response to moisture conditions with respect to the ecologically-defined minimum and maximum limits of Normalized Difference Vegetation Index values (2001-2010).

Source: USGS/FEWS NET

\* Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS) based on data from Benin, Burkina Faso, Cap Vert, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambie, Ghana, Guinée, Guinée Bissau, Mali (AGHRYMET), Mauritanie, Niger, Nigeria, Liberia (2008/09-2010/11), Senegal, Sierra Leone (2009/10-2010/11), Tchad, Togo

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.