



GUIDANCE

# Agriculture & Livestock Position Paper

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## Contents

<b>1. AGRICULTURE SECTOR.....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Agricultural context in the Syrian Arab Republic.....	3
1.2 Agriculture challenges.....	3
1.3 Lessons learned from the previous agricultural experiences.....	4
1.4 Options and scenarios to mitigate the challenges .....	5
1.4.1 Short-term scenarios.....	5
1.4.2 Long-term scenarios .....	5
1.5 Messages to donors and clusters .....	6
1.6 Food security and livelihood (FSL) cluster initiative to support the value chain .....	6
<b>2. LIVESTOCK SECTOR.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Livestock context analysis .....	7
2.2 Livestock challenges.....	7
2.3 Lessons learned from previous emergencies .....	7
2.4 Options and scenarios to mitigate the challenges .....	8
2.5 Messages to donors and clusters .....	8
<b>ANNEXES .....</b>	<b>9</b>

# 1. Agriculture Sector

## 1.1 Agricultural context in the Syrian Arab Republic

Agriculture is considered as the main source of income in Syria and agriculture production is the main factor in food security. The contribution of agriculture used to be nearly 30 percent, employing 25 percent of the total labour force. Agriculture has also a vital role in providing raw materials for the food manufacturing sector of the food industry. Syria has been able to grow a wide variety of agricultural products due to the diversity in climate of the country. The main crops in NW Syria are wheat, vegetables, barley, some legumes such as fava bean, chickpeas, and lentils in addition to cash crops and maize. And this season depends mainly on rainfall and the summer crops need irrigation. It is necessary to adopt efficient irrigation systems due to the marked increasing water scarcity and food production needs of the population. In addition to this there are orchard trees such as olives, pistachio, and cherries. Where before the crisis in Syria, the situation of farmers was generally good, livelihoods were average and the inputs for farmers (seeds, fertilizers and fuel) were accessible and supported, local markets were available especially for strategic crops such as wheat and cotton. The Government used to procure production from farmers with good prices through the Syrian Public Establishment for Grains (SPEG). On the other hand, the olive sector was supported through providing farmers with subsidized seedlings via the government established nurseries. In addition, agricultural guidance and support centres were available. In general, the agriculture situation was acceptable. On the contrary, the remaining crops were not supported in any way.

## 1.2 Agriculture challenges

Escalating violence over ten years of conflict have exacerbated the problems in the country's agriculture sector. A lack of functional agricultural infrastructure continues to constrain production. The area that is planted with cereals in this year's cropping season is the smallest ever. As the conflict enters its eleventh year, Saraqeb, Maarat al-Numan, north Hama and Khan Sheikhon were lost, which were the main centres of wheat cultivation in NW Syria.

The volatility in the exchange market continued to raise most prices of agricultural inputs, making them out of the reach of vulnerable farmers in NW Syria. By the beginning of 2012 all the agriculture directorates (related to the Government of Syria) had stopped working in NW Syria, which resulted in a decrease in the standard of living of farmers, increasing prices for agricultural inputs and losing some, increasing transportation, storage and irrigation fees due to the high prices of fuel and electricity outages which halted most of the machinery used for agriculture. The markets became limited and dependent on supply and demand. Moreover, cold-storage warehouse units and vegetable processing centres diminished due to the security situation and the high cost of work in any field of activity. All these factors led to a decrease in vegetable production "fresh or/and processed" which makes the markets limited.

In addition, the poor condition of agricultural roads in the villages of the governorate due to the density and pressure of the use of these roads with a lack or absence of maintenance and restoration, has placed a new burden on farmers due to the disruption of agricultural service

mechanisms or high rental costs. Caught between conflict and climate change, the agricultural sector in Syria has been hard hit. The worst drought occurred in the 2020/2021 winter season affecting all plants especially crops such as wheat and cash crops. The total annual precipitation rate does not exceed 40-60 percent of the normal rate. Changes in precipitation can disrupt a wide range of natural processes, particularly if these changes occur more quickly than plant and animal species can adapt. Many farmers replanted their land with the same or other crops because they did not have the ability to irrigate their fields. The drought resulted in a decrease in crop production that in consequence deepens the gap in the food security of the people in NW Syria. The frost wave that occurred at the end of January 2021, the characteristics of the winter season were different from those regularly encountered in Syria, as temperatures decreased by the end of January to below zero (-1 to -3 C°) across all governorates (except for the coastal governorates). The Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) images indicate low vegetation percentages compared to the previous year. This has come as an additional burden to the prolonged crisis of the last 10 years.

In addition, wildfires in Syria adversely affected production of wheat, barley, olives and other tree crops over the summer months of 2020. The crop fires burned cereal crops in Northeast Syria and destroyed olive trees, fruit trees and forest cover in the coastal area. Existing vulnerabilities are further compounded by the threat of a COVID-19 outbreak and by a severe economic downturn. This is likely to have grave consequences on food availability in northern Syria and on the food security of farming households. Where in 2020, agricultural production witnessed a slight improvement over the past few years especially for wheat, with an estimated total production of 2.83 million tons, though this is almost 30 percent less than the pre-crisis average of 4.1 million tons. Furthermore, there has been a deterioration in the local Syrian wheat varieties. In NW Syria, the main actors supporting the agriculture value chain are INGOs/NGOs, agriculture departments, the General Organization for Seed Multiplication (GOSM) and the Grain Foundation.

### 1.3 Lessons learned from the previous agricultural experiences

- The wheat and olive value chain has a great impact on local communities in NW Syria and plays an important role in the support to beneficiaries to shift from food assistance to livelihoods programmes. Further, the value chain covers the whole range of activities, i.e., from production to the delivery of products to consumers with the provision of agricultural technical support.
- Supporting small and medium-size farmers was important since they are productive farmers and affect the agriculture value chain.
- Supporting intercropping farms was beneficial in providing food, especially legume plants, to vulnerable people and the degree of land use increased.
- Supporting market-driven income-generating activities (IGAs) including vocational training. The IGAs include food/dairy processing, vegetable production through provision of small business grants and technical training.
- Supporting the rehabilitation of public and participatory irrigation infrastructures has

positively reflected on: crop productivity, livelihood generation, and the prevention of digging more wells.

- Creating associations of irrigation project beneficiaries partially could be considered as a sustainable exit strategy from agricultural infrastructure rehabilitation projects.

## 1.4 Options and scenarios to mitigate the challenges

### 1.4.1 Short-term scenarios

- Support income activities especially for women and IDPs as cash for work (CFW).
- Support small agribusiness grants.
- Support agricultural inputs for farmers with technical extension i.e. transfer of know-how, learning by doing and more advanced technology in the areas of good agricultural practices.
- Support studies related to drought mitigation, prediction and results.

### 1.4.2 Long-term scenarios

- Support farmers to help them in terms of preventing farmers from selling or renting their land, as they will be engaged in continuing to cultivate arable land and olive trees.
- Enhance cost sharing through partial support for farmers with no interest loans especially for water pumping.
- Support IDPs to have access to agricultural land and help them to cultivate the land in order to increase their monthly income; this would also reduce the risk of child labour and early marriage.
- Enhance agricultural products marketing by supporting the whole value chain.
- Improve food security at community level through support to agriculture (agricultural roads, silos, and mills) and irrigation infrastructure.
- Support other agricultural bodies such as GOSM and SPEG as they are the main actors in the agriculture sector.
- Support programmes of certified seed production and local flour production.
- Support the value chain for strategic crops (wheat, olives, vegetables and legumes) which directly affect food security.
- Improve local production of forage crops (especially rainfed crops such as vetch, barley and fava bean).
- Establish small to medium food processing workshops to support agricultural products marketing and the creation of new job opportunities. This will support local food production, decrease food prices, increase people's purchasing power and improve their food

consumption and nutrition. It is recommended to involve the private sector for sustainability.

- Support the cultivation of local varieties and varieties that are tolerant to climate change, especially drought.
- Support studies related to the hydrological situation and water management in NW Syria.
- Support large-scale rehabilitation works for the main irrigation infrastructures such as the Ayn al-Zarqa irrigation network.
- Support the agricultural extension system and empower research initiatives with more focus on the incidence and severity of diseases and pests.

### 1.5 Messages to donors and clusters

After ten years of war, livelihoods activities should be the first priority for donors and clusters. The agricultural support should be designed over the long term to provide comprehensive cover to the strategic crops value chain which is structured in three main phases:

- Production, including agricultural input supply and extension services.
- Processing in terms of providing local products such as wheat-flour and olive oil.
- Marketing-commercialization of the products for people's consumption.

### 1.6 Food security and livelihood (FSL) cluster initiative to support the value chain

- In the FSL cluster logical framework, the value chain is a key activity and recommended under SO 3: Improve communities' capacity to sustain households' livelihoods by improving linkages with the value chain through the rehabilitation/ building of productive infrastructure as well as supporting services and early warning and disaster risk reduction (DRR) systems.
- The FSL cluster continues to support value chain activities as "FSL cluster priorities" and as a key element of the implementation strategy, specifically supporting the value chains (wheat, olives, legumes, and vegetables) over three phases:
  - i. Production and inputs: distribution of agricultural inputs and assets including irrigation and harvesting costs, provision of technical extension sessions/trainings
  - ii. Processing: rehabilitation of bakeries, flour mills, olive mills/presses and silos for storage.
  - iii. Marketing:
    1. To locally purchase wheat from farmers and use the purchased wheat either in bread production (through a contract with flour mills and bakeries) or in wheat cultivation for the next season by contracting new farmers.
    2. Supporting food processing to expand access to vegetable marketing.

## 2. Livestock Sector

### 2.1 Livestock context analysis

In 2020, military aggression in Northwest Syria displaced 900,000 humans, up to 650,000 sheep and goats and up to 1 million chickens<sup>1</sup>. The extent of these displacements is illustrated by the fact that in the opposition part of NW Syria in August 2020, 50 percent of all sheep and goat owning households were internally displaced persons (IDPs)<sup>2</sup>.

### 2.2 Livestock challenges

Due to overconcentration of sheep flocks, pastures are extremely limited in Idlib Governorate. Animal feed is an acute need and very costly, buying feed for their animals surpasses the financial means of many IDPs. In addition, production of fodder barley by local farmers is disrupted and local markets in Idlib are no longer functioning normally. For NW Syria, most of the animal feed and almost all veterinary drugs have to be imported from Turkey. The extreme devaluation of the Syrian pound makes imports even more costly. Veterinary vaccines are not available in NW Syria.

Mixing of sheep flocks from different governorates, districts and subdistricts has created a high-risk situation for outbreaks of livestock epidemics. In 2020, an outbreak of lumpy skin disease (LSD) in GoS areas did not spread to NW Syria, thanks to timely vaccinations specifically targeting this infection. Uncontrolled spread of bovine ephemeral fever (BEF) and of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) are posing a serious threat for 2021.

The following veterinary vaccinations are most urgent in 2021: foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) and sheep pox. While it is also important to refresh LSD vaccinations in the second half of 2021, the season for vaccinating bovine ephemeral fever (BEF) in 2021 has already passed.

In relation to the cold season 2021/2022, lack of shelter for animals is an acute need. IDPs have problems finding warm shelter for themselves and cannot provide stables for their animals. In particular, newborn lambs are at risk of dying from hypothermia.

### 2.3 Lessons learned from previous emergencies

Once rural IDPs have completely dropped out of livestock production, it is almost impossible for them to return to animal production as a source of livelihood.

Prophylactic livestock vaccination campaigns implemented before outbreaks of livestock epidemics occur are of paramount importance to protect the productive assets of livestock dependent rural households.

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<sup>1</sup> Estimate: 150,000 IDP households (HHs) with 7 chickens each (in 2019 HHs in IDP camps had on average 7 chickens, FAO data).

<sup>2</sup> Peste des petits ruminants (PPR) vaccination data: in NW Syria the average flock size was 41 sheep per household (FAO August 2020).

## 2.4 Options and scenarios to mitigate the challenges

- Large-scale import of animal feed from Turkey; because IDPs have no means for storing large quantities of feed, feed should be stored in non-governmental organization (NGO) managed warehouses and distributed to IDPs in small quantities that can be used up immediately (repeat rounds of distribution).
- Long-term support for local animal feed production<sup>3</sup> and fodder barley and forage crops production to ease shortages; in addition to the link between agriculture as feed crops and livestock activities.
- Organizations can support the planting of alfalfa in the areas that are located near rivers such as Ghandourah and Jarablus. It is very important to improve local production of forage crops especially the rainfed crops such as vetch, barley and fava bean. Also intercropping with trees.
- The following veterinary vaccinations are now most urgent in 2021: foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) and sheep pox.
- Provision of shelter for livestock should be considered for the cold season 2021/2022, in addition to suitable water resources for animals.
- Scale-up support to dairy processing as income-generating activities (IGAs) through provision of small business grants and technical training especially for good marketing and branding. Also support for quality control in dairy production by establishing laboratories and support for cooperative associations with regard to sustainability.
- Scale-up support to veterinary extension services, veterinarian capacity building, the cold storage chain, enhance the vaccine supply chain through public institutions, and the early warning system.

## 2.5 Messages to donors and clusters

**Protection of livestock assets is a top priority.** Since the massive displacements of rural populations in NW Syria in 2020, the relative importance of livestock as a means of livelihood has increased significantly. Sheep, goats and chickens are the last productive assets that IDPs still own. As per FAO data from August 2020, every second sheep-owning family in NW Syria is an IDP household. Without provision of feed and basic animal health services, unsustainable sales of animals to meet acute daily needs and losses of animals to disease outbreaks will fast erode the potential for IDP households to engage in any productive activity in the future. The resulting shortage of affordable animal source foods at household level and in local markets worsens the present nutritional deficiencies in children and in pregnant or breast-feeding women. Nutritional deficiency compromises immunity against COVID-19.

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<sup>3</sup> Upscaling of successful pilot for village-based animal feed production implemented by FAO and partners in 2020.

## ANNEXES

1. [Preventive measures for COVID-19 during implementation of the agricultural project](#)
2. [Vegetable market assessment in NW Syria](#)
3. [Guidance on the intercropping agriculture system](#)
4. [FSL cluster SO 2 and SO 3 response packages](#)
5. [FSL cluster priorities 2021](#)



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