



# Iraq COVID-19 Food Security Monitor

Weekly Update - Issue 18

22 September 2020

## Government of Iraq (GoI) Announcements

Date	Government Decision
21 September 2020	The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) announced that yellow corn and watermelon have been removed from the list of 23 products for which an import ban applies. This reflects the domestic seasonal production cycle and favors production and marketing of local produce.

### I. Key Messages

- The government has started repaying farmers for their cereal crops in governorates affected by the Daesh incursion, which were marketed to government silos in the period of 2014-15.
- Preparation for the winter crop planting season has begun, with governorates accommodating plans to irrigation prospects as river water levels reach record lows.
- Government food basket distribution is picking up, as more commodities are received by the ministry of Trade, expanding on local distributions.
- The national average of main food commodities prices remained stable, with a slight reduction in sugar and wheat flour prices, with continued variation in seasonal vegetable prices between governorates.

### II. Overview

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has continued to spread in Iraq. As of 7 September 2020, the World Health Organization reported 345,969 cases and 8,935 deaths, roughly a 10% increase in cases compared to previous report.<sup>1</sup>

The global economic slowdown, driven by pandemic containment measures, decreased the demand for oil and put downward pressure on prices. In Iraq, oil income accounts for 90% of the government revenue and the drop in oil prices has had a significant impact on country's finances. Over the past two weeks, Basra heavy oil prices have remained stable, fluctuating between USD 39.5 and USD 43.3 per barrel, up from minimum of USD 18.7 per barrel in April 2020, but well below USD 57.5 per barrel, the price recorded roughly one year ago.<sup>2</sup>

The Iraqi government received support in response to COVID-19 from several donors. The Saudi Fund for Development Fund will help establish a grain silo in Diwaniyah Governorate and a hospital in Anbar.<sup>3</sup> The French government will help the MoA rehabilitate aircraft for pest control, such as the Dubas date palm bug.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the European Union Ambassador met with the Minister of Agriculture to discuss opportunities to develop the sector sustainably.

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 released financial payments to farmers in Ninewa and Salah Al Din who marketed their barley crop to the government in 2014, continuing the process of dues repayment that has been ongoing. Around 29 marketers received this payment, after they received clearance from the National Security Council.<sup>5</sup>

The Ministry of Agriculture through the Directorate of Agriculture (DoA) in Diwaniyah is expecting rice production to increase during current summer season to 163,987 tons, divided between 20,447 tons of amber variety, 143,427 tons of jasmine, 113 tons of furat variety. The above average marketing season for the rice harvest has been delivered by a total planted area 144,750 dunums distributed within the regions Al Shamiya, Ghammas, Al Mahnawiyah, Al Salih, and Al Shanafiyah. The ministry indicated that there are plans, in coordination with the DoA in Diwaniyah and the Ministry of Water Resources, to increase production in the rural areas by providing adequate water to irrigate the crop, as well as finding sustainable cultivation methods. The General Company for Grain Trading is planning to receive the entire marketed rice production as it can hold around 132,000 tons in the governorate silos.<sup>6</sup>

The MoA has begun preparing for the 2020/21 wheat season. Maysan has continued using laser leveling technology to prepare agriculture lands for wheat planting, ensuring even distribution of irrigation water and fertilizers.<sup>7</sup> The Directorate of Water Resources in Karbala, Wassit and Diyala began preparing for the winter agriculture season by repairing irrigation systems, such as trenches, corroded pipes and drainage systems.<sup>8</sup>

#### Other Challenges.

Water resources continue to be a challenge for the agriculture sector; however, the upcoming agriculture winter plan will cover 10 million dunams, a reduction compared to last year's 15 million dunams, due to the fact that there will be a 20% reduction in water allocated to agriculture in the 2020/21 season.<sup>9</sup>

The Department of Forestry and Combating Desertification in the Ministry of Agriculture, carried out a wide afforestation campaign in Haditha district in Anbar Governorate. Under the , under the slogan "Green Iraq," the campaign aims to reduce the effects of desertification and dust storms and protect residential and agricultural areas. This campaign aims to halt sand dune encroachment, rehabilitate the Iraqi environment and create natural windbreaks to reduce dust storms. Similar projects have been undertaken in Diwaniyah and Al-Mada'in.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> WHO COVID-19 Dashboard. Accessed on September 22, 2020. <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/iq>

<sup>2</sup> Oil Price Charts. Accessed on September 22, 2020. <https://oilprice.com/oil-price-charts>

<sup>3</sup> Government of Iraq. September 10, 2020. Accessed on September 21, 2020. <http://www.cabinet.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=9761>

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Agriculture. <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8569>

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Agriculture. <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8572>

<sup>6</sup> <http://zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8583>

<sup>7</sup> Ashour Land. September 16, 2020. Accessed on September 21, 2020. <https://ashourland.net/2020/09/16>

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Water Resources. Multiple links – September 2020. Accessed on September 21, 2020. <https://mowr.gov.iq>

<sup>9</sup> <https://almawrid.news/contents/view/details?id=17361>

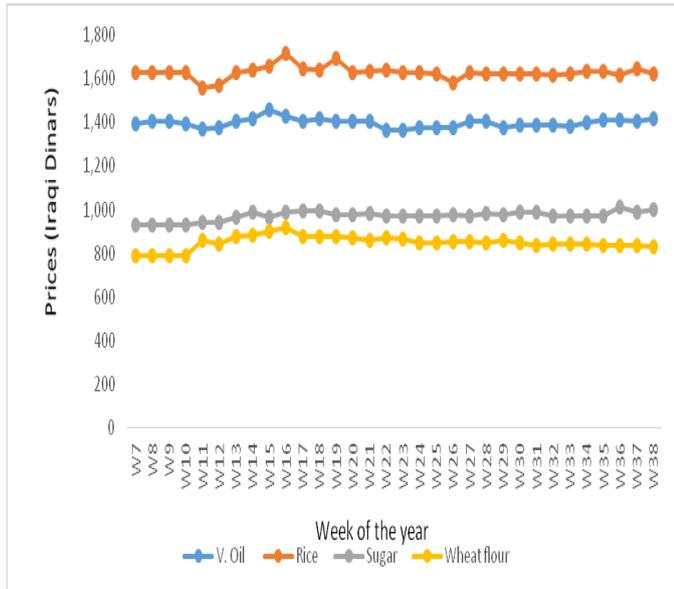
<sup>10</sup> Al Filah. Accessed on September 21, 2020. <https://www.alfilah.com/2939>

#### IV. Food Supply: Markets (farm to market)

As on September 19<sup>th</sup>, the Ministry of Trade (MoT) announced a new distribution of sugar quantities for the PDS ration across Iraq. MoT confirmed that Public Distribution System (PDS) warehouses are full of sugar parcels that are ready to be distributed to the agents and in all governorates.<sup>11</sup>

#### V. Food Demand (markets to consumers)

**Prices.** When comparing with the first week of September, the national average of main food commodities prices remained stable, with a slight reduction in sugar and wheat flour prices (-1%) (Sugar IQD 1014 to 989 per kg) and (IQD 838 to 833 per kg). These minor changes were as a result of decreases in sugar prices in Duhok by -17% (IQD 1500 to 1250 per kg) and decreases in



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

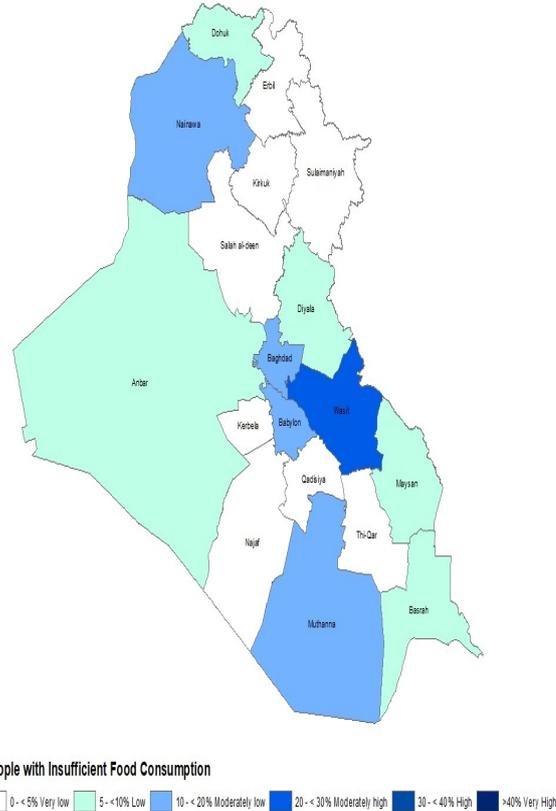
wheat flour prices in Muthanna by -20% (IQD 500 to 400 per kg) and in Kirkuk by -11% (IQD950 to 850 per kg). However, in Thi-Qar the prices of wheat flour increased by 15% (IQD 650 to 750 per kg).

The variation of seasonal vegetable prices between governorates continued. Compared with the first week of September, National average price of tomato witnessed 20% increase (IQD 617 to 714 per kg), where 10 out of 18 governorates faced at least 30% increase of tomato prices. Tomato prices increased 100% (IQD 500 to 1000) in Erbil, Thi-Qar and Wasit, and increased by 50% (IQD 500 to 750 per kg) in Maysan, Muthanna and Salah Al-din, and in Babil, Diyala and Qadisiya it increased by 33% (IQD 750 to 1000 per kg). On the other hand, tomato prices decreased by 33% in Anbar, Baghdad (IQD 750 to 500 per kg) and Kirkuk (IQD 500 to 333 per kg). The weekly prices of potato on average witnessed a slight increase by 6% (IQD 624 to 663 per kg), the main increases were in Kirkuk (88%) (IQD 333 to 625 per kg), Wasit (50%) (IQD 500 to 750 per kg) and Ninewa (43%) (IQD 350 to 500 per kg). Potatoes prices decreased in Baghdad and Kerbala by -33% (IQD 750 to 500 per kg). On the other hand, onion prices on average decreased by 5% (IQD 630 to 596 per kg), mainly in Duhok, Muthanna and Thi-Qar by around 33%, but increased in Kirkuk and Ninewa by 50% and 43% respectively.

#### Consumption Patterns.

On September 18<sup>th</sup>, WFP mVAM estimated approximately 2.9 million people had insufficient food consumption. Compared with the last week of August, this was a reduction of about 374,500 individuals. However, Wasit governorate continued to have a moderately high prevalence of insufficient food consumption, with around 22% of the population (256,600 individuals) considered food insecure. During the same period, the negative food-based coping

strategies, which is calculated based on a severity score (rCSI), decreased from 12% to 10.7% (around 4.9 to around 4.1 million) of households, where the highest percentage was in Muthanna by 63% and lowest was in Kerbala by 2%. The common strategy was relying on less expensive food, with 31.5% households reporting adopting that coping strategy, which was decreased from 32.75% to 31.5% compared to the last week of August. Additionally, a significant drop from 22.1% to 13.8% of households reported issues accessing the markets.



**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).**

#### VI. Food Supply Chain for Vulnerable Populations

##### Ongoing Response

Food Security Cluster partners have distributed 6200 food rations to host community and returnee families in Sinjar and surrounding villages. Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) has distributed food assistance to 705 HH IDPs living in the informal settlements of Kilo 7,8 and 19 camps in Anbar.

<sup>11</sup>Ministry of Trade. . MOT Official Facebook page. Accessed September 19, 2020