



Iraq COVID-19 Food Security Monitor

Weekly Update - Issue 1

14 April 2020

Government of Iraq COVID-19 Response

Date	Government Decision
March 2, 2020	Crisis Cell Committee formed under the authority of Cabinet Order Decision No. 55, chaired by the Ministry of Health
March 6, 2020	Crisis Cell formed within each Ministry, including the Ministry of Agriculture
March 15, 2020	Prime Minister issued Order 151, outlining committee membership
March 26, 2020	Council of Ministers form the Supreme Committee for Health and National Safety
March 26, 2020	Council of Ministers formed committee to respond to private mill owners' requests for support

I. Key messages

- The Government of Iraq (GoI) has taken measures to allow the food supply chain to function normally, thus food production and supply (including imports) are generally stable and adequate for consumers.
- Farmers and livestock owners can travel to their farms during the curfew without registering with officials.
- Food prices are generally stable; however, certain staple foods have increased in fragile and less shock-resistant areas of Iraq, especially in Diyala, Duhok, Wassit and Ninewa.
- The outlook for the upcoming barley and wheat harvests (2019-2020) is good, and GoI continues to facilitate the harvest and storage of the crops, in addition to purchasing and selling farmers' products at subsidized prices.
- Farmers are concerned about the drop in oil prices and resulting loss of fiscal revenue for GoI as it may affect the government's ability to purchase their crops.
- Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) reported locusts in southern Iraq, but have conducted control operations and continues to monitor the populations.

II. Overview

The World Health Organization declared novel coronavirus (COVID-19) a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. After the initial outbreak in Wuhan, China, the coronavirus began to spread worldwide and affected more than a million people in 180 countries in just three months. Iraq reported its first case of COVID-19 on February 24, 2020 in Najaf. Since February, the number of cases have grown in both federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, leading both the federal and regional governments to enforce movement restrictions and curfews to curtail transmission of the disease. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Bank are actively tracking the impact of this crisis on agriculture production and the overall food system, and response measures taken by the Government of Iraq.

III. Food Supply: Production (primarily on farm)

Overall, farmers and livestock owners can travel to their fields and farms during the curfew without needing to register with

officials (Decision No. 55). Therefore, farmers are still able to sow seeds, harvest crops and/or maintain their herds. Farm laborers can also travel during curfew to access fields in coordination with the authorities and local councils (Decision No. 55). Marine fishing has halted due to the curfew; however, fresh fish production continues.

A time series analysis of cropland vegetation cover (NDVI) captured every 10 days shows a positive "greenness" trend this year when compared to the long-term average, indicating that mean crop production may be above average this season (Figure 1). Additional seasonal indicators are available on FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) Iraq page, including the Agriculture Stress Index that facilitates early warning of cultivated areas likely to suffer from water stress (i.e. drought).

The MoA continues to provide fertilizers, seeds and machinery to producers at subsidized prices. MoA Directorates (i.e. the

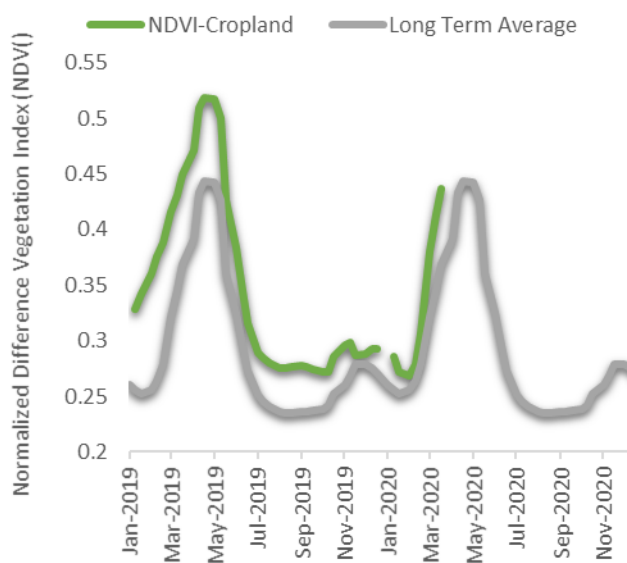


Figure 1. Comparison of 2019/2020 Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) of cropland compared to the 20-year average using MODIS satellite data.

1. This chart is produced using WFP's Seasonal Monitor platform.

2. Iraq GIEWS Portal. <http://www.fao.org/giews/earthobservation/country/index.jsp?code=IRQ>

Plant Protection Directorate, Veterinary Services Directorate and Plant Production Departments) and the private sector, including the Mesopotamian Company and General Company for Agricultural Supplies, have been encouraged to receive continue operations to provide support, services and supplies to farmers. For example, MoA is facilitating the passage of the harvesting machinery and their crews between governorates, in addition to establishing storage facilities to receive barley. On April 2nd, barley harvesting began in central and southern Iraq, and MoA will continue to receive and pay farmers for the barley, then processing and selling the barley at a subsidized price to livestock owners.

MoA has reported locusts in southern Iraq, including the governorates of Al Anbar, Najaf, Thi-qar and Al Muthanna. MoA has conducted aerial pesticide spraying as a preventative measure in Al Muthanna governorate.

IV. Food Supply: Markets (farm gate to markets)

Markets. Under the supervision of the MoA, trucks transporting agricultural products to wholesale markets are exempt from curfew movement restrictions (Decision No. 55). Each governorate has at least two central wholesale markets, in addition to secondary selling “centers” called *alwa*. Until now, all appear to be functioning normally. Agriculture processing continues -- all red meat/poultry slaughterhouses and fresh water fisheries are operating normally, sending products to the market daily. To date, markets appear to have sufficient quantities of commodities to meet consumer demand.

Imports and Exports of Foodstuffs. Agriculture and food products are still moving across borders; however, due to the closure of the border outlets, Gol and KRG are not issuing import licenses. Policies banning the import of certain items continues during the COVID-19 outbreak; the MoA prohibited the import of 25 agricultural products in order to promote local production, and this policy has not changed.³

V. Food Demand (markets to consumers)

Prices. WFP’s analysis of the latest food and non-food price data reveals that during the last two weeks of March, prices have started surging in fragile and less shock-responsive areas of Iraq especially Diyala, Duhok, Wassit and Ninewa areas. During the review period, the prices of various items increased in different hotspot areas. For example, sugar prices witnessed a 100% increase in Erbil. Potato prices increased in Ninewa by 88% and in Wassit by 50%. Egg prices increased in Salah al-Din by 48%. MoA reports that these prices have stabilized — the surge may have been due to hoarding practices; however, the Gol is monitoring the situation closely. The government is not fixing food prices; however, MoA has clearly stated that it will take legal action against any vendor manipulating prices during the crisis (Decision No. 55).

Vulnerable Groups. In the context of COVID-19, social distancing, lockdown and curfew are reducing the economic activity in the country, which in turn is negatively affecting the most vulnerable groups such as daily casual laborers and low-income workers. The longer the lockdowns continue, the larger the impact will be on those employed in the informal sector

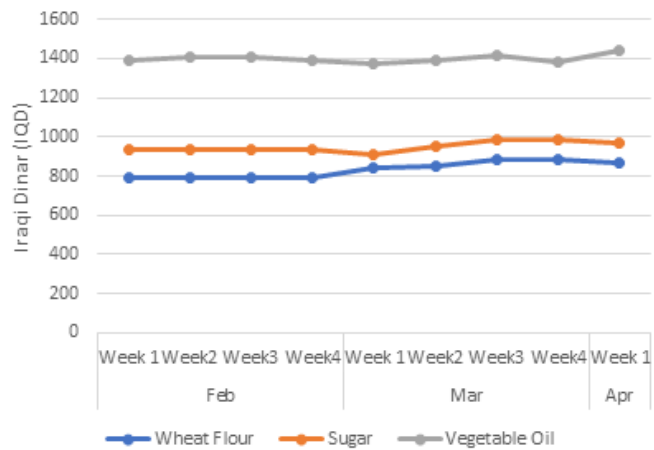


Figure 2. Weekly food prices (national averages) for three staple commodities during the COVID-19 crisis.

especially IDPs and refugees. Additionally, there will be an impact on the poorest Iraqis, many of whom work in these informal sectors and live in peri-urban settings of metropolitan areas. The communities in the south are also of concern as they suffered higher rates of food insecurity and poverty prior to the introduction of COVID-19 mitigation measures.

Once the lockdown ends, implementing quick-impact programmes that allow for quick influx of cash (i.e. Cash+, Cash for Work, etc.) in locations like Baghdad, Basra and Mosul will be essential to provide a stopgap arrangement for the most vulnerable groups.

Camp based Population. There are no reports of any immediate, serious impact of COVID-19 on the food security in the camps. Some delays were reported in cashing out food assistance entitlements, primarily linked to banking limitations; however, families are managing to cash out their entitlements.

Consumption. Major supermarkets are open for a period of three hours per day, while smaller stores can be open from 8.00 am until 4.00 pm. Consumer demand for “basic” vegetables (i.e. tomatoes, potatoes and onions) continues to be high and, thus far, the market has been able to meet the demand.

VI. Food Supply Chain for Vulnerable Populations

The MoA, with direction from HE the Minister, distributed 100 egg boxes (36,000 eggs) to poor families in various governorates. The Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) also distributed double rations to internally displaced people (IDPs) in camps, amounting to 44.5 kg per family.

VII. Recommendations

1. Consider monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on food security, providing updates on weekly and monthly basis. FAO, WFP and WB are conducting a joint assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on food security in Iraq to identify potential actions to minimize the crisis. The first joint report is expected in May2020.
2. Facilitate dialogue with key partners and direct resources to the most critical needs.
3. Prioritize vulnerable groups, including IDPs, Returnees and refugees.

3. i.e. cucumber, yellow corn, eggplant, cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, lettuce, garlic, watermelon, green pepper, dates, table eggs, live chicken, slaughtered chicken, tomatoes, beet-root, honey, potatoes and frozen marine fish