



## Iraq COVID-19 Food Security Monitor

Weekly Update - Issue 2

21 April 2020

### Government of Iraq Announcements

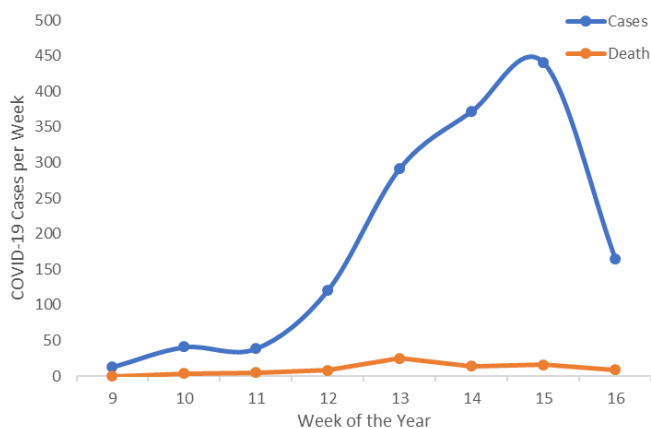
| Date           | Government Decision  |
|----------------|--|
| April 15, 2020 | Supreme Committee excludes officials and employees of the Ministries of Agriculture and Trade from curfew.     |
| April 15, 2020 | Council of Ministers postpones the payment of land rental fees for agricultural tenants.                       |
| Sources:       | <a href="http://www.shafaaq.com">www.shafaaq.com</a><br><a href="http://www.faceiraq.org">www.faceiraq.org</a> |

### I. Key Messages

- **Wheat and barley harvesting is underway in the south, with the Iraqi government announcing that wheat prices at government silos will be similar to previous years.**
- **Markets and food prices are generally stable.**
- **Approximately 2.5 million people self-registered for the government's *Minha* programme, which will provide 30,000 IQD to individuals impacted by COVID-19.**
- **Emergency food distributions are ongoing, with plans to increase targets based on needs and resources.**

### II. Overview

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to affect the world, with many countries enforcing social distancing and lockdown measures to contain the spread of the virus. Globally, the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases crossed 2.25 million; however, during week 16 (12-18 April 2020) the cumulative number of cases decreased by 2% compared to the previous week. Since February, both federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region (KR-I) have enforced movement restrictions and curfews to curtail transmission of the disease. Iraq's measures appear to be effective; the week-to-week cumulative number of cases decreased 63% in week 16, with only 164 confirmed cases reported compared to 440 cases in week 15 (Figure 1). As of this report, the measures will remain



**Figure 1.** Number of reported COVID-19 cases and deaths in Iraq by week, where week 16 is April 12-18th.

in place until the beginning of Ramadan (April 23/24) in both federal Iraq and KR-I. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Bank continue to track the impact of this crisis on food security, agriculture production and the overall food system.

### III. Food Supply: Production (primarily on farm)

Farmers continue to be able to access their fields and herds despite the continued curfews in both federal Iraq and KR-I. In southern Iraq, the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) has informed FAO that they have begun harvesting more than 3.25 million hectares of wheat and barley. The Government of Iraq (GoI) announced that they will buy wheat grain from farmers at the same prices as previous years; depending on the quality, prices range from around 420,000 to 520,000 IQD per tonne. Rafidain Bank, a government-owned bank, also announced that branches will be open and able to cash-out farmers for deliveries. These disbursements will follow the standard procedure; upon delivery to the government silos, the Ministry of Trade will issue a letter to the bank about the quantity and price due to the farmer, which the farmer will present to the bank to collect the cash.<sup>1</sup> These announcements may assuage farmers' fears about the governments' ability to purchase their crops due to the dropping oil prices.

On April 15<sup>th</sup>, the Thi Qar Department of Agriculture announced a lifting of the two-month fishing ban. The ban was imposed due to the fish breeding season, not due to COVID-19 mitigation measures.<sup>2</sup>

According to the GoI Ministry of Water Resources, the national dams and reservoirs currently hold 50 billion m<sup>3</sup> of water.<sup>3</sup> Based on their analysis, this is a sufficient to meet agricultural, industrial and domestic water needs for the foreseeable future, despite upstream infrastructure developments.

**Other Challenges.** The Desert Locust swarms in central and southern Iraq appear to be under control thanks to the Ministry of Agriculture control operations. In Anbar and Al Muthanna, pesticide spraying continues in the desert where nymphs and a few swarms have been reported. Last week, a local variety of locusts were reported in KR-I; however, this was a common species of locust that emerges every season. The Kurdish

<sup>1</sup> Face Iraq. April 20, 2020. <https://www.faceiraq.org/inews.php?id=7673505>

<sup>2</sup> Face Iraq. April 15, 2020. <https://www.faceiraq.org/inews.php?id=7667666>

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Water Resources. Facebook. April 16, 2020. <https://ar-ar.facebook.com/waterresources2/>

Regional government (KRG) responded efficiently and effectively to control the outbreak.

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

**Markets.** MoA has installed cameras and established field inspection teams to monitor local food prices. WFP has also established a system called mVAM to monitor food security and market functionality in the context of COVID-19. Using household and retailer telephone interviews, WFP can track various food security indicators (i.e. food consumption, coping strategies, COVID-19 impact), as well as market functionality indices (MFI), including prices, multi-sectoral assortment, availability, integration and resilience. mVAM and MFI information will be shared in this report from May onwards.

Iraq oil revenues continue to slide with the price of crude oil. The Iraqi government based the 2020 budget on a projected average price of \$56 per barrel. Iraq's premium crude, the Basrah Light, is slated to be sold at approximately \$14 per barrel in May (around a 7 dollar discount to the dated Brent benchmark price). Oil accounts for 90% of state revenue, thus the government will face challenges in filling this gap.

**Imports and Exports.** Businesses with valid licenses continue to be able to import food, agricultural products and medical goods. Iraq also announced that it aims to import 1 million tonnes of wheat and 250,000 tonnes of rice in order to increase their strategic food reserves.<sup>4</sup> Although Iraq is anticipating an above average 2019/2020 season wheat yield, Iraq will continue to import high volumes of wheat in order to increase stockpiles. Wheat imports are primarily sourced from Australia, Canada and the United States, countries who continue to export globally and retain relatively high stocks.

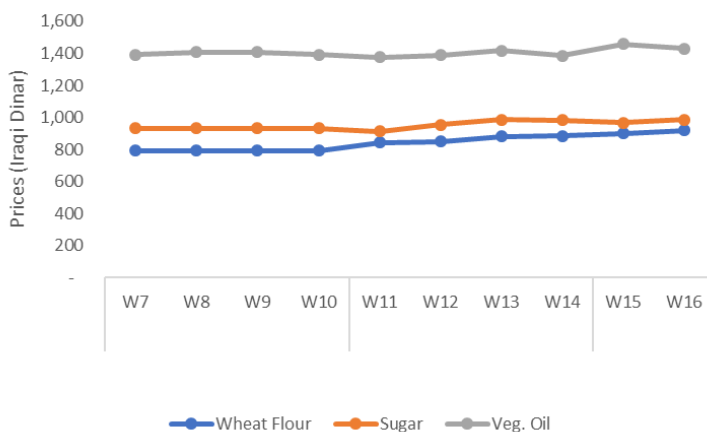
**Food Reserves.** The Iraq Ministry of Trade (MoT) reported that they currently have two months of supplies for the Public Distribution System (PDS). They are currently processing five million bags of wheat and other food items for their third distribution cycle, prioritizing people impacted by lockdown and curfew. MoT staff and the flour processing company are working daily to improve the storage facilities and meet deadlines.

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

**Prices.** Markets and food commodity prices have been generally stable this week. According to WFP weekly price monitoring data, basic food items did not witness any significant increase at the national level. A slight increase in the price of wheat flour was observed in Sulaimaniyah; prices jumped to 1,300 IQD as compared to 1,200 IQD last week.

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

**Ongoing Response.** The Supreme Committee for National Health and Safety, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA), launched an assistance package of 30,000 IQD per person. This programme, called *Minha*, aims to support the most vulnerable people who have been impacted by the COVID-19 curfew and lockdown measures. In order to be eligible, Iraqis had to self-register by April 16th using a newly launched website. By the deadline, approximately 2.5 million people self-registered. In collaboration with MoT,



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

MoLSA is working on developing targeting criteria to aid the neediest people.

On April 6th, MoLSA called for 1 million food parcels to be distributed, and several NGOs and local companies responded to the request. These parcels will be targeted to those who are not currently receiving MoLSA assistance or regular government salaries, with a focus on those with special needs. Approximately 5,000-6,000 parcel distributions (average 20-25 Kg) have been reported so far. The number of distributions are expected to increase in the days leading up to Ramadan. Local community and religious groups are also conducting campaigns that are likely to witness a similar increase before and during Ramadan.

The Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) covered more than 95% of the internally displaced people (IDPs) in-camp population from January to April, distributing a monthly emergency package of 20.3kg. In March, MoMD also did a double ration distribution. MoMD has indicated a planned expansion of their assistance to the refugee population.

KRG authorities are also planning to distribute 200,000 food rations to vulnerable people. WFP will provide technical support if needed.

**UN/NGO Response.** WFP is increasing its current caseload of refugees and IDPs for the May distribution cycle. Cash assistance will be expanded to all the in-camp IDPs by including those previously excluded during targeting exercises. Under its COVID-19 response, WFP also estimates providing assistance to an additional 35,000 in-camp refugees. Although a large portion of those refugees are already identified based on their pre-COVID-19 vulnerabilities, a system to identify additional refugee and IDP caseload has been finalized. WFP is also considering an increase in its assistance value if food prices increase.

Local and international organizations involved in the Food Security Cluster also report adopting new approaches in light of COVID-19; organizations able to move have been conducting emergency food basket distributions, while others with limited movements have worked to increase local procurement and transition trainings to online platforms.

<sup>4</sup> Thukral, Naveen. Reuters. March 26, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-food-security/world-food-security-at-risk-as-exporters-curb-sales-importers-buy-more-idUSL4N2BJOLK>