



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations



World Food
Programme

Rapid Food Systems Assessment

Jordan

April 8, 2020

Introduction

The Coronavirus has reached over 200 countries including Jordan. Martial law was put into place on March 15 to curtail movement of people and the spread of coronavirus, with more rigorous lockdowns called as and when needed. All flights were banned except for cargo and the Aqaba port closed. The number of cases of coronavirus in Jordan was as high as 353 but went down to 209 with 6 deaths reported. Irbid is one of the epicenters of cases (and is an agricultural area) and is in full lockdown. Several neighboring countries have reported cases of the virus.

The methodology for this rapid assessment makes use of primary data through interviews with key stakeholders and secondary data through review of government documents, news articles, etc. The interviews were held with NGOs, Producer associations and others, with relevance as of today, April 8, 2020. This is a qualitative rapid assessment follow-up to the previous assessments. Key messages are:

- 1. Food production at farm level is constrained by the travel ban for farmers, farm workers and transporters, and by the limited availability of input supplies.**
- 2. The MoA has started an online system to provide electronic travel permits for all actors although it is not fully operational. It has announced a new loan of 10 m JOD for farmers effected by the crisis.**
- 3. Three wholesale markets have been closed this week due to exposure to Coronavirus. Better practices are being implemented to ensure health and safety in markets.**
- 4. Consumer prices are protected as a high priority.**
- 5. Food (and cash) Assistance to refugees and vulnerable people has increased since the Coronavirus.**
- 6. Stock of grain and staples are being monitored closely with little risk of inadequate supply.**

1. Food production

Overall, food production on farms is at good levels although farmers are faced with several challenges. Food production at farm level is constrained by the travel ban for farmers and for farm workers and by the limited availability of input supplies due to business closure during the lockdown.

Reference: MoA has issued to farmers a "Public Health and Safety Guide" specifying precautions on how to pick vegetables and fruits, package them and send them to market. ¹

- a. Access to farms: With the travel ban of March 22, at first, paper permit systems were created but due to the overall misuse of the issuance of these permits for farmers, the Minister of Agriculture resigned. Now, an electronic permit system is being put in place, as announced on

¹ It also describes how farmers should protect themselves in their farms, homes, markets and slaughterhouses.

- b. April 6 by the new Minister. The permits will be provided to all actors in the food supply chain including farm owners, packing operators, export agents, input providers, veterinarians, nurseries, breeders, livestock farmers, etc. The new systems checks farmers' registration in the MoA database but this currently does not include many small farmers. The website shows registered people by governorate. If a farmer or actor is not in the database, they need to request registration separately. This may cause delay in farm access for farmers. In summary, there are ongoing difficulties for a good number of farmers and other actors to reach their workplaces. This will create further repercussions in the sector.

Link: [Announcing the mechanism for granting traffic permits to farmers and agricultural business owners](#) | Petra AR (including details of how many permits are allowed per animal head, farm size, etc)

Lesson Learned: Producers who are organized in producer associations are at a clear advantage in organizing and obtaining travel permits from the Ministry.

- a. Farm production is constrained by lack of inputs and unavailability of fertilizers, medicines and other materials. Input suppliers do not have permission to open their stores as yet. Presumably, they will be provided travel permits through the new electronic system of MoA although it may take another week to register this category.
- b. Workers: Due to the travel ban and curfew, daily workers (many Syrians) who are not living on farms are not able to travel to their work. The travel difficulties are worse for workers than for the farmers. Those that live on the farm pose no challenge although those that need to travel to reach farms for work are often blocked. From before the COVID crisis, farmers had protested as work permits for Egyptians became more expensive and more difficult to obtain. Hence, there was already a lack of workers to start with. There are reports of laborers going to the farms within walking distance and there are reports that the government allow a limited number of workers on a farm at any one time. The shortage of workers and the limited time for farmers and workers to work on the farm result in 1) late harvesting of produce and sometimes unfit for sale (size is undesirably big) and rejected by consumers and thrown away, 2) planting activities may be delayed or compromised, and 3) other farm activities such as pollination may be delayed or carried out in a simplified way due to limited labor.

Links and references: Various interviews including Abdullah Zaben, the president of the Jordan Exporters and Producers Association for Fruit and Vegetables.

- c. Government will support farmers affected by COVID virus and by the recent storms with JOD 10 million zero-interest loans through the Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC). Farmers will have a grace period of 5 years. The ACC is working to define the terms and conditions of the loan fund.

*Links: [AlGhad article of March 30](#) and [Jordan Times article of zero interest loan of March 30](#)
["Agricultural Credit" postpones farmers' loan installments for two months](#) | AlGhad AR*

2. Food production to market

- d. This week, three wholesale food markets were closed due to contact with coronavirus patients, the first Al-Arda, the most important wholesale fruit and veg market in the Jordan Valley, the second the Irbid vegetable market and the third in Ajloun. Al-arda has been re-opened after 3 days of closure. Markets are places where hundreds of people interact including farmers, retailers, private citizens, store owners, etc. Queuing and social distancing are now being used and further improvements will be needed to ensure the safe and healthy operation of markets. The transporters of fruits and vegetables as of today can travel freely. Links: [Closing Al-Arda wholesale market closed until further notice over coronavirus](#)
[Closing Irbid wholesale vegetable market until further notice over coronavirus](#)
- e. Exports: Exports have been allowed by Jordan authorities for essential and non-essential produce. However, there are logistical difficulties which still have not been resolved.

3. Food consumption (WFP)

- a. In general, people continue to have access to food, with price hikes experienced for a short period after the lockdown and curfew was announced. Government of Jordan enacted various economic measures to combat the anticipated unfavorable consequences of the virus such as the introduction of price ceilings on essential products for consumers as shown in the table below. Enforcing agents control the stores and supermarkets to ensure adherence to set prices, and sanctions are given to violators.

Links: <https://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/trade-ministry-sets-wholesale-price-ceiling-demand-vegetables-eggs>

Standard food prices set in Jordan for consumers		
Food item	Weight	Price ceiling (JOD)
Fresh chicken	1 Kg	2.00
Frozen chicken	1 Kg	1.70
Chicken (Nattafat)	1 Kg	1.40
Potato	1 Kg	0.45
Tomato	1 Kg	0.40
Cucumber	1 Kg	0.50
Zucchini	1 Kg	0.65
Eggplant	1 Kg	0.40
Onion	1 Kg	0.50

- b. The domestic use of water has increased since the epidemic broke out.
[Minister of Water: plans to deal with increasing water demand](#) | *AlMamlaka AR*

4. Food systems for refugees in camps and vulnerable people (WFP)

WFP ensured to work with partners and service providers to guarantee that beneficiaries have access to food given the lockdown and curfew being enforced by the government. Cash assistance for the month of April was provided to beneficiaries' accounts ahead of the originally planned dates. This was coordinated with contracted shops and suppliers to make sure that a stock of Six to eight months of dry commodities are available and stocked for camps. WFP also made arrangements to facilitate access to cash assistance provided to beneficiaries living in host communities.

5. Stock levels of imported food (WFP)

Ensuring adequate stock levels of staples and imported foods is an item of high priority for the King. In terms of availability, the government announced that freights of land, air and sea freight for goods, food and medicine will continue, stressing that there will be no shortage of food and medicine in Jordan. The King and Crown Prince checked on strategic grain reserves at Ghabawi bunker silos. According to the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Supply, storage capacities around the Kingdom total of 1.1 million tonnes and are expected to reach 1.45 million tonnes by the yearend.

[Strategic grain reserves of Royanews](#)