



Iraq COVID-19 Food Security Monitor

Weekly Update - Issue 5

12 May 2020

Government of Iraq (GoI) Announcements

Date	Government Decision
May 7, 2020	Iraqi parliament has sworn in Prime Minister Mustafa Al Kadhim.
May 7, 2020	The Supreme Committee for Health and National Safety has announced that the Zurbatiya border crossing between Iraq and Iran has reopened for the import of food and agricultural inputs. ¹

I. Key Messages

- **Wheat and barley harvesting is mostly completed in the south, continuing in the center and launching in the north.**
- **Overall, national food prices remained stable.**
- **The Civil Defense Directorate reported 62 field fires in 13 governorates, estimating that 237 hectares of cropland have burned nationwide in the past 20 days.**
- **The Plant Protection Directorate is conducting control operations for the Dubas bug, Humara pest, Sunn pest and Red Palm Weevil.**

II. Overview

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to affect the world, including Iraq. As of May 10, 2020, the World Health Organization reported 2,767 cases in Iraq, with 109 deaths. Movement restrictions and curfews remain in place to curtail transmission of the disease; however, certain measures have been relaxed. 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.

On May 7th, Iraq formed a new government. The Iraqi Parliament has sworn in Prime Minister Mustafa Al Kadhim. The majority of the appointed Ministers have been approved, including His Excellency Mahdi Rashid as the Minister of Water Resources.

III. Food Supply: Production (primarily on farm)

Wheat and barley harvesting is mostly completed in the south, continuing in the center and launching in the north. The Ministry of Trade has ramped up monitoring of wheat marketing centers in order to ensure the proper procedures are followed.²

In Ninewa governorate, harvesting of 1.5 million hectares (ha) of wheat and barley has begun. Historically known as the

breadbasket of Iraq, the governorate is a major contributor to Iraq's cereal production. The barley harvest will commence first and from May 17th, barley receiving centers will be open and the current price is set to be 420,000IQD per ton. Wheat harvesting is anticipated to commence during the first week of June.³

Other Challenges. Between April 20, 2020 to May 10, 2020, the Civil Defense Directorate reported 62 fires in 13 governorates. Approximately 237 ha of cropland have burned nationwide in the past 20 days.⁴ Fires are attributed to seasonal activities (i.e. uncontrolled crop residue burning), accidents (i.e. generator sparks) and arson. In comparison, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that by May 31st last year there were 250 crop fires impacting 8,646 ha.⁵

The Dubas bug, which impacts date palm, has spread to Karbala, Babel, Najaf, Wasit, Diyala and Baghdad. Control operations continue in Karbala, Babel and Wassit, but will soon shift to Baghdad and Diyala due to concerns that the higher temperatures in those governorates will accelerate the Dubas bugs' propagation. As of now, control campaigns will continue up to first week of June. In addition the Dubas bug, the Humara pest (Lesser Date Moth) also affects date palms and has spread to all date producing governorates. Control campaigns have begun against this common date palm pest and will continue into June, starting in the south and shifting to the northern and western governorates in the future.

Desert Locust populations appear to be under control; thus, the Plant Protection Directorate has suspended control operations and is preparing a report on the impact of the pest on wheat yields. The Sunn pest, which primarily attacks wheat and barley, has been reported in Al Najaf, Ninewah, Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaimaniyah. Control campaigns have been completed in Al Najaf and are ongoing in Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaimaniyah. In Ninewa, the Plant Protection Directorate distributed

¹ General Secretariat for the Council of Ministers. May 7, 2020. Accessed on May 10, 2020. <https://cabinet.iq/ArticleShow.aspx?ID=9587>

² Ministry of Agriculture. May 11, 2020. Accessed on May 11, 2020. Ninewah crops. <http://www.zeraa.gov.iq/index.php?name=News&file=article&sid=8459>

³ Ministry of Commerce. May 12, 2020. Accessed on May 12, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/1611368825806977-وزارةالتجارةالعراقية-1611368825806977>

⁴ Face Iraq. FIRES. May 10, 2020. Accessed on May 11, 2020. <https://www.faceiraq.org/inews.php?id=7702348>

⁵ OCHA. June 10, 2019. Accessed on May 12, 2020. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20190610_iraqhumanitariansnapshot_may.pdf

pesticides to farmers, but a formal campaign has not been launched. Control campaigns against Red Palm Weevil continue as normal, with consistent monitoring and treatment when necessary.

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

Imports and Exports. In alignment with the Supreme Committee for Health and National Safety decision, the Zurbatiya border crossing between Iraq and Iran has reopened for the import of food and agriculture inputs to stabilize the local markets and prices.¹ The border will be open two days a week.

KRG has announced revised import tariffs for 2020 on certain vegetables, fruit and animal products.⁶ Depending on the product, tariffs will either be imposed throughout the year or during certain growing seasons. Overall, agricultural and animal product tariffs have increased since 2019, most noticeably for vegetable products.

V. Food Demand (markets to consumers)

Prices. Weekly price data revealed that the national price average for rice increased 3% during Week 19 (May 3—9th) compared to Week 18, with the largest increases in Basra (25%; 2,000 to 2,500 IQD), Kirkuk (20%; 1,250 to 1,500 IQD) and Thi Qar (14%; 1,750 to 2000 IQD). On the other hand, the average national price of sugar and vegetable oil over the same time period decreased by 2% and 1% respectively; sugar prices decreased by 25% in Diyala and vegetable oil prices by 17% in Duhok and Anbar. National wheat flour prices have remained stable compared to the last week of April.

Consumption Patterns. WFP's Food Consumption Score (FCS) indicator found that most surveyed households (94%) have acceptable consumption, with a few (5%) in the borderline category and only 2% under the borderline (poor). Similar to last week; however, half of the households with an acceptable food consumption were still employing food based coping strategies, and those percentages increase to 90% for borderline and 97% for poor households. A common strategy was to reduce adult food consumption so children could eat.

75% of households with poor food consumption were employed; however, those same households reported that their main concern was a loss of livelihoods. On the other hand, households with acceptable FCSs were concerned about COVID-19.

VI. Food Supply Chain for Vulnerable Populations

Ongoing Response. Pension payments for Iraqi government civil servant retirees were made available on May 8, 2020. The GoI has stated that funds allocated to retiree salaries, social welfare programmes and other vulnerable populations continue to be prioritized.⁷

The third Public Distribution System (PDS) cycle for wheat flour has been completed. The General Company for Grain

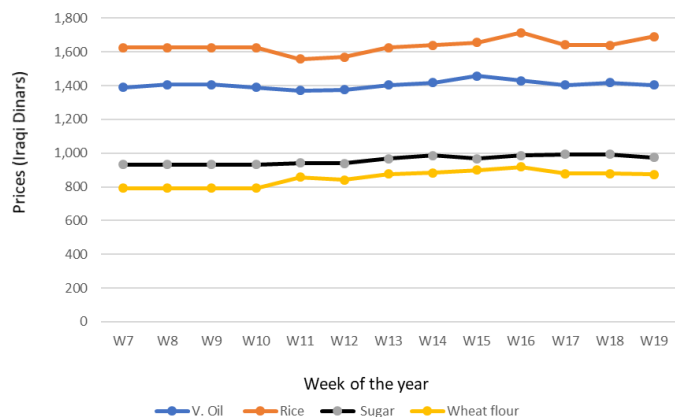


Figure 1. Weekly food prices (national averages) for four staple commodities during the COVID-19 crisis.

Trade has announced that in preparation for the fourth cycle, mills are being supplied with 1,235,860 metric tonnes (MT) of wheat to produce 40 million bags of flour. As of now, 840,000 bags have already been produced. The General Company announced that it had issued strict guidelines for all its headquarters and production sites in addition to the mills operating in strict compliance with health and safety measures and the recommendations of the Crisis Cell and the Command Committee. Monitoring teams from MoT are also working on facility fumigation.

The Ministry of Planning *Minha* team has introduced a simplified mechanism to transfer cash to selected households, leveraging cash-out points that are distributed throughout the governorates and approved by the Central Bank. Targeted households will receive a short message service (SMS) informing them of their grant amount and the nearest cash-out point. Cash distributions started on May 8th and will be staggered to avoid large gathering around the pay-out points. The pay-out will be verified electronically.⁸

UN/NGO Response. On March 22nd, the GoI launched a national campaign to encourage non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and charities to respond to COVID-19. In order to track campaigns, the NGO Directorate under the Minister's Council General Secretariat created an online platform where activities could be reported. As of April 26th, the Iraqi Cabinet reported that a total of 666 NGOs have been actively responding to the COVID-19 crisis. Nationwide, the government estimates that a total of 1,268,081 beneficiaries have received food assistance since the start of the campaign.⁹

The Food Security Cluster partners continue to respond with emergency food basket distributions. The Barzani Charity Foundation (BCF) has also distributed food assistance to a total of 48,283 families through the 'Food Hotline' project.¹⁰

⁶ Products with KRG import tariffs include squash, cucumber, dry onion, potato, tomato, okra, green beans/cowpea, pepper, snake cucumber, eggplant, watermelon, melon, lettuce, cauliflower, cabbage, broccoli, leafy crops, green onion, mushroom, sunflower, peaches, figs, apple, pomegranate, grapes, cherry, chicken meat (whole and processed), table eggs, fish (live, fresh and frozen) and yoghurt.

⁷ Iraq Parliament. May 8, 2020. Accessed on May 10, 2020. <https://ar.parliament.iq/2020/05/08/>

⁸ Ministry of Planning. May 7, 2020. Accessed on May 12, 2020. <https://mop.gov.iq/news/view/details?id=375>

⁹ Government of Iraq NGO Department. Accessed on May 12, 2020. <http://www.ngoao.gov.iq/PageViewer.aspx?id=27>

¹⁰ Barzani Charity Foundation. Accessed on May 12, 2020. <http://www.bcf.krd/english/coronavirus/>