



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

WFP Nicaragua Country Brief January 2025



Local smallholder farmers harvesting beans for processing ©WFP/Nicaragua

Operational Context

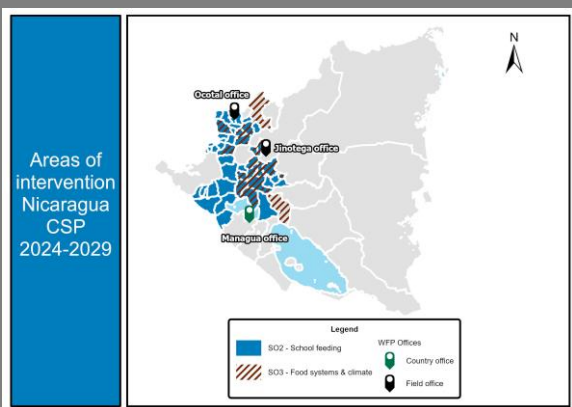
Nicaragua, the largest country in Central America, remains one of the poorest in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its economy relies on light manufacturing, services, and agriculture. Despite recent growth, multiple crises and global challenges highlight the vulnerability of its food systems.

Nicaragua's economy and social outcomes are highly susceptible to external shocks and natural hazards due to its dependence on climate-sensitive sectors. Ranked 20th in the 2024 World Risk Index, recurrent extreme climate events significantly contribute to food insecurity.

According to the latest national census, 40% of the population lives in rural areas, with about half in poverty and 16.3% in extreme poverty. Agriculture is the main livelihood for 73% of the rural population. Smallholder farmers, who produce 79% of basic food staples, face high levels of food insecurity. Gender inequality further hinders women farmers' access to markets.

High informal employment leaves poor households with unstable incomes, struggling to access food. In the Dry Corridor, climate variability severely affects family farming, leading to agricultural losses and undermining food security. Additionally, high food prices and global economic pressures increase agricultural input costs, threatening local food systems. Many vulnerable households resort to negative food-related coping strategies and remove their children from schools.

WFP supports the Government in advancing food security and nutrition in vulnerable Dry Corridor communities of Nicaragua by enhancing nutrition-sensitive social protection programmes. WFP has been present in the country since 1971.



Population: **6.9 million**

2023/4 Human Development Index: **130 out of 193**

Income Level: **Lower middle**

Chronic malnutrition (Stunting): **7.8% of children less than 5 years old***

*Nicaragua Nutritional Census 2023

In Numbers*



1,106.4 mt of food distributed for school feeding programme



427.65 mt of food was procured from smallholder farmers for upcoming school feeding distribution



USD 4.8 million 12-months (February 2025 - January 2026) net funding requirements



182,961 people assisted in January 2025



*Preliminary figures

Operational Updates

Emergency Preparedness and Response

- WFP is strengthening its Emergency Preparedness and Response Package (EPRP) for 2025 to enhance its capacity to anticipate and respond to natural hazards in the country, including droughts, hurricanes, and earthquakes. This includes updating its Concept of Operations (CONOPS), which outlines WFP's initial response strategy and guidelines for scaling up operations during emergencies. All functional units will contribute to defining minimum preparedness actions. Additionally, WFP will collaborate with SINAPRED to share internal mechanisms and best practices, including supporting the national shock-responsive social protection system.

School Feeding

- WFP, in coordination with the Ministry of Education (MINED), has delivered 1,106.4 metric tons of food as part of the first distribution of 2025 in support of the national school feeding programme. This provided hot meals to 181,898 schoolchildren across 1,700 schools in Nicaragua's Dry Corridor, helping to meet their daily nutritional needs. Food rations included beans, maize, and rice which provide proteins, calcium and energy (kcal) necessary for children's growth and performance.
- WFP continued its planning for 2025 activities that will be jointly reviewed with MINED at a later stage; as well as the Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) pilot. Following the selection of three potential suppliers for supplying vegetables and eggs, a proposal for fresh ration is under assessment to promote a healthy and balanced diet.

Local Food Systems

- Through WFP's capacity-strengthening efforts, a smallholder farmers' organization secured 5 contracts to deliver 872.45 metric tons of staple crops—including maize, beans, and rice—to the school meal programme, gaining stable access to institutional markets. Meanwhile, another farmers' organization finalized a bean supply agreement with local traders, including Walmart and departmental supermarkets, expanding market reach for small-scale farmers.

WFP Country Strategic Plan

Country Strategic Plan (2019-2024)		
Total Requirement (in USD)	Allocated Contributions (in USD)	12 Month Net Funding Requirements (in USD)
80.9 M	49.7 M	4.8 M

Strategic Result 1: People are better able to meet their urgent food and nutrition needs

Strategic Outcome 1: Populations affected by or exposed to crises in Nicaragua meet their food, nutrition and other urgent essential needs in an inclusive way during shocks, stressors and protracted crises, and benefit from the strengthening of capacities and systems for integrated disaster risk management by 2029.

Focus area: Crisis response

Activities:

- Provide humanitarian assistance to people affected by or exposed to crises and provide technical support to strengthen the capacities of disaster risk management actors and response systems, using an approach that takes account of nutrition, protection, gender and interculturality issues.

Strategic Result 2: People have better nutrition, health and education outcomes

Strategic Outcome 2: Girls, boys and adolescents in schools and their families in priority areas of Nicaragua benefit from a strengthened social protection system, including a comprehensive school feeding programme with fresh, nutritious and locally produced food that will positively contribute to their nutrition, health and education outcomes by 2029.

Focus area: Resilience building

Activities:

- Provide nutritious meals to girls, boys and adolescents through the national school feeding programme, contributing to the strengthening of national social protection programmes using approaches that take account of gender, protection, nutrition, interculturality and climate resilience.

Strategic Result 3: People have improved and sustainable livelihoods

Strategic Outcome 3: Smallholders and key food systems actors in prioritized areas of Nicaragua, especially women, are resilient with sustainable and climate adaptive capacities that improve their access to healthy diets and markets, particularly institutional market of home-grown school feeding by 2029.

Focus area: Resilience building

Activities:

- Strengthen adaptive capacities and develop solutions and models for smallholders, other key food system actors and institutions to enhance climate resilience, food security and nutrition; and improve their access to markets in an equitable and equal manner.
- Provide technical assistance to smallholder farmers to increase their resilience, improve their livelihoods and reduce their vulnerability to adverse climate events.

Strategic Result 5: Humanitarian and development actors are more efficient and effective

Strategic Outcome 4: National institutions and United Nations entities receive operational support services from WFP in an effective, efficient and reliable manner in Nicaragua, enabling them to assist people affected by or exposed to crises until 2029.

Focus area: Crisis response

Activities:

- Provide services required by national institutions and United Nations entities to facilitate timely assistance for people affected by or exposed to crises.

Local Food Systems (Cont.)

- A WFP-supported smallholder farmer organization has successfully enhanced a variety tomato production through its hydroponic plot, an innovative soil-free system that optimizes resource efficiency and crop yield. Now in its productive stage, the initiative has yielded 45 produce trays, all sold in the Matagalpa market, demonstrating its effectiveness in boosting local agricultural output and market access. By adopting innovative techniques, the cooperative contributes to food security, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability in the area.

Nutrition and Gender

- WFP's Nutrition Unit developed a proposal for fresh food rations for the Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) pilot, which aims to incorporate locally sourced produce into school meals. Among the proposed fresh food items are tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, cabbage, onions, and eggs, which will provide essential nutrients to children. To ensure balanced nutrition, WFP calculates the quantity, weight, and nutritional contribution of each food item while assessing storage conditions and shelf life to maintain quality and safety.

Monitoring

- WFP continued its work on data assurance for the preparation of two Annual Country Reports for 2024. It has provided coordination and technical support to its programme units, ensuring accurate processing of outcome and output results, beneficiary counts, and goal planning for the upcoming period.

Challenges

- **Funding Gaps:** Urgently securing funding for the **second and third distribution** of the **school feeding programme** scheduled for **April and August remains critical for WFP**. Without **2.6 M**, WFP will risk reducing the number of targeted schoolchildren.

Resource Outlook

- WFP urgently requires **USD 4.8 million** to be able to respond to the needs of the **upcoming 12-months (February 2025 – January 2026)**. Failure to secure more resources would mean that WFP will be unable to provide school meals to over 180,000 children during April and August's school meal distribution. It would also prevent efforts to strengthen local food systems, further impacting those most vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity.

Donors

Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, USAID, European Commission, Canada, Switzerland, Nicaragua, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, and private donors.

Contact info: Maria Victoria Tassano (mariavictoria.tassano@wfp.org)

Country Director: Giorgia Testolin

Further information: www.wfp.org/countries/Nicaragua