

GLOBAL INFORMATION AND EARLY WARNING SYSTEM ON FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (GIEWS)

SPECIAL ALERT

No. 331

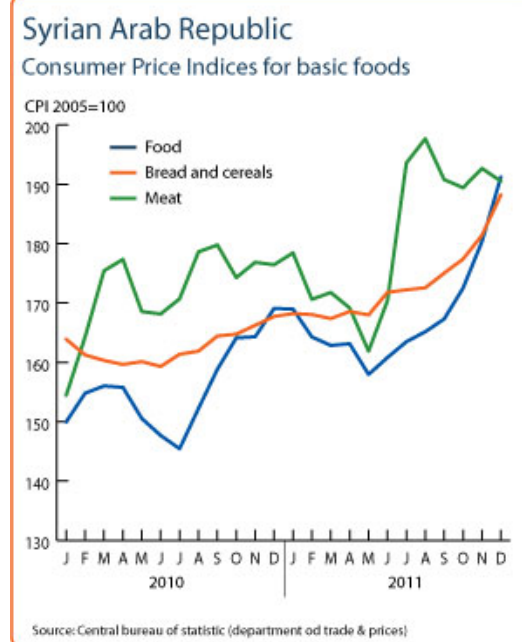
COUNTRY: THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

DATE: 14 March 2012

Civil unrest raises grave concern for food security

Continued civil unrest in the Syrian Arab Republic since mid-March 2011 has raised serious concern over the state of food security, particularly for vulnerable groups. Following the unrest, a contraction is forecast in the 2011 real GDP and the downturn is expected to continue in 2012. Economic and trading sanctions together with the strong depreciation of the local currency (Syrian pound) are expected to negatively affect the country's commercial import capacity, including food commodities. The imposition of an additional 30 percent tax by the Syrian Arab Republic on goods imported from Turkey is expected to put further pressure on domestic prices and hence reduce access to food particularly for poorer households. According to the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics, inflation increased between June and December 2011 by about 15 percent, mainly driven by sharp increases in food prices and by fuel shortages that are impacting on transportation costs.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) estimated in 2010 that about 1.4 million food insecure were living in areas which have now become conflict hotspots such as Homs, Hama, rural Damascus, Daraa and Idlib and the concern is that they now have become even more vulnerable. Tens of thousands of people have already fled to neighbouring countries. Access to food, water and fuel is reported to have become increasingly difficult in several areas. An estimated 300 000 small farmers and herders in northeastern provinces, who have already suffered four consecutive seasons of drought, are also affected by the loss of opportunities from seasonal labour migration to the south and east. In addition, the unrest is affecting pastoralists by restricting mobility of herds, with negative effects on access to water and pasture, and reducing access to veterinary drugs and other supplies. Overall, the economic downturn is also expected to impact the Government's fiscal capacity to support consumer and producer subsidy schemes.



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, ROME

Syrian Arab Republic

Cereal production

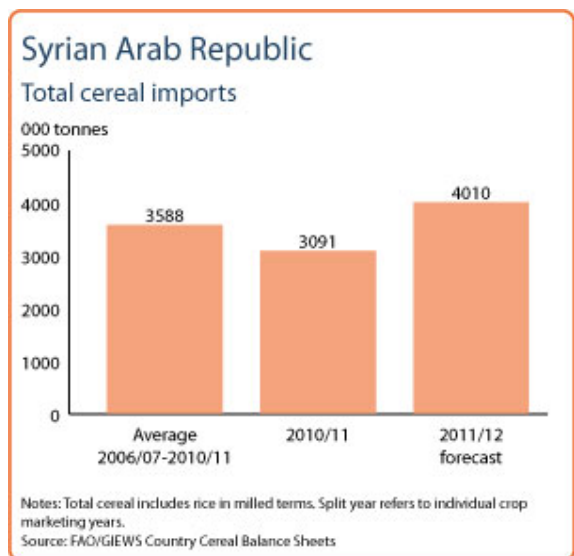
	2006-2010 average	2010	2011 estimate	change 2011/2010
	000 tonnes			percent
Wheat	3 683	3 600	3 250	-10
Barley	799	900	800	-11
Maize	196	181	180	-1
Others	7	8	8	0
Total	4 685	4 689	4 238	-10

Note: percentage change calculated from unrounded data.
Source: FAO/GIEWS Country Cereal Balance Sheets

The outlook for the 2012 winter cereal crops, currently at vegetative stage and for harvest from May, is uncertain given possible disruptions in overall agricultural activities and limited availability and access to inputs such as fertilizer and seeds. Last year's cereal production, estimated at 4.2 million tonnes, was about 10 percent less than the previous five years' average, following late and erratic rains that led to poor crop establishment, especially in major rainfed crop producing areas of Al Hasakah and Al Raqqa in the north and north-east. In addition, in several areas, it is reported that civil insecurity prevented farmers to access their farmland during the harvest.

The country relies on food imports for almost half of its total domestic utilization. Preliminary forecast of cereal import requirements - mainly wheat for food use and maize and barley for feed - in marketing year 2011/12 (July/June) is put at around 4.0 million tonnes, about 1 million tonnes more than the previous year.

A close monitoring of the country's food security situation is needed and, as soon as conditions permit, a detailed in-country assessment is warranted in order to devise appropriate interventions. Recently, a budget increase to an Emergency Operation (EMOP) was approved by WFP and FAO for delivering food assistance to 100 000 people affected by the unrest until June 2012.



This report is prepared on the responsibility of the FAO Secretariat with information from official and unofficial sources. Since conditions may change rapidly, please contact EST-GIEWS, FAO, (Fax: 0039-06-5705-4495, E-Mail (INTERNET): GIEWS1@FAO.ORG) for further information if required.

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