

## NIGER Food Security Alert

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### Government survey suggests above-normal food insecurity

On January 25, Niger's Early Warning System (SAP) publicly released the results of its December 2009 National Rapid Household Food Security Survey. According to this assessment, 2.7 million people are "more vulnerable" to food insecurity during 2010 and an additional 5.1 million people are "moderately vulnerable" to food insecurity. These high numbers reflect the effects of poor rainfall during the 2009 rainy season on agriculture, pasture, water availability, and labor opportunities. These findings corroborate FEWS NET's analysis, which predicts high and extreme levels of food insecurity during the coming six to nine months, especially in eastern agropastoral and pastoral areas. Substantial assistance will be needed. However, media reports which suggest that half of Niger's population will face food shortages and malnutrition have misinterpreted assessment findings.

The government's assessment concluded that 2.7 million people are "more vulnerable" to food insecurity. This means that as of December 2009 these people had exhausted their normal means of coping and have begun engaging in negative coping strategies, including reduced kilocalorie consumption, reduced meal frequency, consumption of foods of last resort, and begging. The most affected regions are Tahoua, Diffa, and Zinder, while livelihood zones with highest percent of population affected are the pastoral zone (28 percent) and the agro-pastoral zone (27 percent). The assessment also categorized an additional 5.1 million people as "moderately vulnerable" to food insecurity. Estimates of the food insecure population from this 2009 survey are not directly comparable to surveys from previous years because of differences in the survey tool and because the survey's definition of vulnerability differs from other recent surveys in several important ways.

**Table 1.** Departments for which the population "more vulnerable" to food insecurity exceeds either 33 percent or 100,000 people, ranked by percent of population affected

Department	%	Population
Abalak	62	65,557
Tahoua	47	219,567
Keita	47	219,567
Tchintabaraden	42	49,290
Maine Soroa	41	77,369
Illéla	40	136,129
Tessaoua	37	166,128
Aguie	34	121,426
Tillabéri	33	92,504
Ouallam	32	114,483
Mirriah	27	272,139
Tanout	26	114,572
Dakoro	25	144,222

Note: The survey is representative at a departmental level.

Source: National Early Warning System

FEWS NET's interpretation of these findings are as follows:

- The 2.7 million people characterized by the SAP assessment as "more vulnerable" to food insecurity were, according to the FEWS NET Food Insecurity Severity Scale ([www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale](http://www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale)), moderately to highly food insecure at the time of the survey. Even without any additional shocks, food security for these households is likely to deteriorate to high and extreme levels between January and the end of the 2010 hunger season. In pastoral areas, the hunger season typically ends with the regeneration of pastures in July. In cropping areas the end of the hunger season typically occurs in September with the onset of the main season harvest. Therefore, these households need emergency food and non-food assistance from February through July/September.
- The 5.1 million people characterized as "moderately vulnerable" to food insecurity were generally food secure at the time of the survey according to the FEWS NET scale. This is because, although conditions were poor, an intensification of coping strategies was sufficient for these households to meet food needs. Without additional shocks, these households are expected to continue to meet food needs through 2010, though food access will require the sale of assets such as livestock. Therefore, by the April to June period, FEWS NET expects that many of these households will be considered moderately food insecure. Livelihoods support (e.g., cash-for-work) would be appropriate for these households.
- The most likely shock between now and September 2010 is a sharp rise in food prices. Cereal prices normally increase during the January to September period by three to five percent per month. Households that are "moderately vulnerable" are expected to be able to tolerate price increases of five to ten percent per month this year, all else being equal. However, price increases in excess of five to ten percent per month would constitute a severe shock, resulting in a significant increase in the number of people unable to meet basic food needs and in need of emergency assistance.
- If the 2010 rains do not arrive on time, in May/June 2010, pastoral households will require additional emergency assistance to avoid destitution and increased mortality.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.