



Background

Poor and erratic rainfall since October 2007 has caused the worst drought to strike Syria in four decades. Approximately one million people are severely affected and food insecure, particularly in rainfed areas of the northeast – home to Syria's most vulnerable, agriculture-dependant families. During the 2007/2008 planting season, nearly 75 percent of these households suffered total crop failure. Depleted vegetation in pastures and the exhaustion of feed reserves have forced many herders to sell their livestock at between 60 and 70 percent below cost.

Wheat and barley yields have dropped by 47 and 67 percent, respectively, as compared to the previous year. Since January 2008, the rise in local bread and cereal costs soared to twice that of global inflation rates, drastically reducing the ability of families to meet daily food requirements. The country's emergency wheat stocks have been exhausted. Lack of income, furthered by the necessity to sell off livelihood assets to afford basic needs, is increasing the risk of vulnerable households to fall into permanent destitution.



Farmers preparing their land with FAO seeds and tools

Government efforts to assist affected households have included the provision of emergency aid, animal feed and veterinary services, among other initiatives. However, the needs arising from the crisis exceed Government resources and require the support of the international community. The Syria Drought Appeal was launched on 29 September to address the emergency needs and food security of approximately one million drought-affected people over a six-month timeframe.

Challenges facing food security and agriculture

The one million people (206 000 households) severely affected by the crisis are farmers and herders who lost most of their harvest and flock to the drought. These assets constitute the sole source of income and primary basis for household food security for these families. Approximately 32 percent of land in Syria is arable, of which nearly one-third depends on rainfall for its productivity. Recovery of the agriculture sector will be contingent on the return of rains and the yields of the upcoming planting season, beginning in October, for which farmers currently lack seeds.

The drought caused drastic crop losses, particularly in rainfed zones. Wheat production in non-irrigated areas dropped by 82 percent as compared with the previous season, while the barley harvest failed entirely. Reduced availability of barley, straw and vegetation in pastures coupled with a 75 percent rise in fodder costs have resulted in a 50 percent increase in animal mortality and a 70 percent reduction in fertility rates. Both herders and farmers have sold off productive assets, eroding their source of livelihoods, earnings and household nutrition.

Consequently, food insecurity and malnourishment rates have soared. Since 2007, malnutrition among pregnant women and children under the age of five has doubled.

Without assistance, families will continue to resort to harmful coping strategies, such as reducing their food intake, selling essential assets and migration. Inaction will further deteriorate the livelihoods and self-reliance of vulnerable households and prolong the need for costly relief, such as food aid.

FAO's response

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has appealed for **USD 9.36 million** under the Syria Drought Appeal to support Government efforts to restore food production and safeguard agricultural livelihoods. Unmet requirements amount to USD 8.6 million following support provided by the Central Emergency Response Fund. Protecting the asset base of herders and assisting farmers to resume planting in time for the upcoming season will be paramount to recovering the food security and nutritional status of the most drought-affected families.



FAO's proposed activities aim to:

- **restore the crop production of farmers** through the distribution of drought-resistant, local variety wheat and barley seeds for the upcoming planting season; and
- **safeguard the livelihoods and remaining assets of vulnerable small-scale herders** through the timely provision of animal feed to avert the starvation and sale of livestock.





FAO's COMPONENT OF THE 2008 SYRIA DROUGHT APPEAL

Funding requirements: USD 8.6 million



Project Title: Emergency Response to Support Livelihoods and Food Security of the Destitute Farmers in the Northeastern Governorates in Syria (SYR-08/A01)

Objective: Ensure access to the minimum required wheat and barley seeds on time for the 2008/2009 planting season.

Beneficiaries: 30 000 small-scale farmers.

Partners: Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Funds Required: USD 6 089 930

Project Title: Emergency Response to Support Livelihoods and Food Security of the Destitute Small Herders in the Northeastern Governorates and the Badia (SYR-08/A02)

Objective: Ensure access to 500 g/head/day of animal feed for a duration of two months.

Beneficiaries: 10 000 small-scale herders.

Partners: MAAR and UNRWA.

Funds Required: USD 2 520 000

FAO's proposed project aims to provide 9 000 tonnes of wheat and barley seed to 30 000 small-scale farming households in Ar Raqqa, Dayr az Zawr and Al Hasakah – the governorates most severely affected by the drought. The assistance will enable farmers, who otherwise would be unable to afford sufficient seed, to resume crop production and secure a harvest by spring 2009.

With donor funding, FAO will provide each beneficiary with 300 kg of drought-resistant, local variety wheat and barley seeds. The assistance would enable the cultivation of 60 000 hectares of rainfed land.

The expected production from project inputs would amount to 36 000 tonnes of wheat and 18 000 tonnes of barley. The quantities produced will cover household consumption needs for wheat and leave a surplus of 380 kg of barley per family assisted, which could be sold on the market for a minimum of USD 230 per household.

Project efforts will enhance food security and income generation among Syria's most vulnerable rural households. The assistance will mitigate the effect of the rising costs of farming inputs on agricultural production and directly contribute to maintaining increased levels of food production. This will contribute to local and national food security and enhance vulnerable households' capacity to cope with future shocks.

This project aims to safeguard the livestock of 10 000 herders in the Syrian Badia most at risk of losing their livelihoods owing to the impact of drought. Herders have been unable to feed their animals as a result of the unavailability and increased market cost of animal feed, which rose by 75 percent as compared with prices in 2007.

In response, FAO seeks to provide each beneficiary household with 500 g of feed per animal each day for a period of two months to support the dietary needs of up to 10 animals. The feed will be sufficient to cover the needs of livestock until the rainy season begins and pasture vegetation starts to regenerate.

With donor funding, project efforts will increase the survival and productivity of livestock and deter herders from selling their animals and abandoning their livelihoods. Improved livestock production will bring much-needed income to vulnerable families, helping them to recover losses incurred during the drought.

The increased availability of dairy products and meat will enhance the nutritional status of beneficiary households by diversifying their diet and increasing consumption of protein-rich foods. The food security of surrounding communities will also benefit from greater access to meat and dairy products on the local market.

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