



FAO NEWS RELEASE [10/101 en]

Contact:

Sari Gilbert
Media Relations (Rome)
(+39) 06 570 52518
sari.gilbert@fao.org

Marcus Prior
WFP/ Bangkok
+ 66 (0)2 659 8616
+ 66 (0)81 701 9208 (mobile)
marcus.prior@wfp.org

North Korea faces serious cereal deficit Food shortages and undernourishment to continue

16 November 2010, Rome - About five million people living in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) will continue to face food shortages despite a relatively good harvest and a slight increase in food supply, a joint [report](#) by FAO and WFP said today.

A joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission that visited DPRK in September found that the country faces a cereal import requirement for the 2010/11 marketing year (Nov/Oct) of an estimated 867 000 tonnes. The Government plans to import commercially only about 325 000 tonnes, leaving 542 000 tonnes as an uncovered food deficit. The mission recommended to provide some 305 000 tonnes of international food assistance to the most vulnerable population.

Empty granaries

The mission covered seven of North Korea's 10 provinces, accounting for about 90 percent of the country's cereal production. The warehouses visited contained no cereal stocks while low quality maize available for distribution in October came from the summer harvest and, due to inadequate drying facilities, had excessive moisture content and contaminants.

A substantial increase in cereal production had been expected this year due to some improvement in the availability of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides, operational tractors, diesel fuel and electricity. These expectations, however, were frustrated by a series of extreme weather events such as the intense rainstorms causing severe flooding and consequent crop loss. The combination of these factors resulted in an increase of only three percent in the 2010/11 staple food production over that of 2009/10.

"North Korea's economy has been growing at a sluggish pace of under one percent annually and for many years now has suffered significant food deficits", said Kisan Gunjal, FAO economist and co-leader of the mission. "Furthermore, the performance of the important agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector has been erratic with negative annual growth rates over the last years."

Food aid essential

"The cereal rations provided by the government through its Public Distribution System (PDS) in 2010/11 would likely contribute about half the daily energy requirements. A small shock in the future could trigger a severe negative impact and will be difficult to contain if these chronic deficits are not effectively managed," said Joyce Luma, Chief of WFP's Food Security Analysis Unit and co-leader of the mission.

Those who are most vulnerable to food shortages include children, pregnant women and nursing mothers, the elderly and food insecure in regions with high malnutrition.

In recent years, total cereal production has stagnated at around 4.5 million tonnes annually, compared to the 5.35 million tonnes that the Mission says represent total utilization needs. Paddy (unmilled rice) is the most important crop of the DPRK- followed by maize, potatoes, wheat/barley and soybeans.

In addition to maintaining food assistance programmes in DPRK, the mission recommended: to upgrade storage facilities for potatoes; to improve grain drying methods; to increase production of high-protein legumes; to develop a national policy to provide greater support to household gardens. Also suggested as a means of adding protein to the local diet, is increasing the areas dedicated to fish ponds, therefore broadening aquaculture production.

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FAO | Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy | (+39) 06 570 53625 | www.fao.org
