



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



# Food policy monitoring

in the Near East and North Africa region

Regional food safety – exploring challenges,  
strategies and actions

2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2024 | Bulletin



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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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# ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>ADAFSA</b>   | Abu Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety Authority                  |
| <b>AEC</b>      | Agricultural Export Council                                      |
| <b>AfCFTA</b>   | African Continental Free Trade Area                              |
| <b>AfDB</b>     | African Development Bank   |
| <b>AFRAF</b>    | African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum                        |
| <b>AI</b>       | artificial intelligence  |
| <b>AICS</b>     | Italian Agency for Development Cooperation                       |
| <b>AOAD</b>     | Arab Organization for Agricultural Development                   |
| <b>CAC</b>      | Codex Alimentarius Commission                                    |
| <b>CARI</b>     | Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators for Food Security |
| <b>CCAFRICA</b> | FAO–WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa                        |
| <b>CCNE</b>     | FAO–WHO Coordinating Committee for Near East                     |
| <b>CEPA</b>     | Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement                     |
| <b>DAP</b>      | diammonium phosphate   |
| <b>DCO</b>      | United Nations Development Coordination Office                   |
| <b>EBRD</b>     | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development                 |
| <b>EOS</b>      | Egyptian Organization for Standardization and Quality            |
| <b>ERP</b>      | enterprise resource planning                                     |
| <b>ESCWA</b>    | United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia   |
| <b>FAO</b>      | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations          |
| <b>FAO ESF</b>  | Food Systems and Food Safety Division of the FAO                 |
| <b>FAO RNE</b>  | FAO Regional Office in Near East and North Africa                |
| <b>FBD</b>      | foodborne diseases   |
| <b>FCSAT</b>    | Food Control System Assessment Tool                              |
| <b>FEC</b>      | Food Export Council  |
| <b>FSSA</b>     | Food Safety Strategy for Africa                                  |
| <b>GCC</b>      | Gulf Cooperation Council   |
| <b>GForSS</b>   | Global Food Regulatory Science Society                           |
| <b>GFSI</b>     | Global Food Safety Initiative                                    |



|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>GIZ</b>      | German Agency for International Cooperation                          |
| <b>GSO</b>      | Gulf Standardization Organization                                    |
| <b>IAFP</b>     | International Association for Food Protection                        |
| <b>ICMSF</b>    | International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods |
| <b>ICT</b>      | information and communication technologies                           |
| <b>IMF</b>      | International Monetary Fund  |
| <b>INFOSAN</b>  | FAO/WHO International Food Safety Authorities Network                |
| <b>ITC</b>      | International Trade Centre   |
| <b>IUFoST</b>   | International Union of Food Science and Technology                   |
| <b>LAS</b>      | League of Arab States  |
| <b>LMIC</b>     | low- and middle-income country                                       |
| <b>NBK</b>      | National Bank of Kuwait  |
| <b>NENA</b>     | Near East and North Africa   |
| <b>NFSA</b>     | Egyptian National Food Safety Authority                              |
| <b>NIAR</b>     | Moroccan Institute for Agricultural Research                         |
| <b>ONSSA</b>    | Moroccan National Office of Food Safety                              |
| <b>PARERA</b>   | Food Risk Analysis and Regulatory Excellence Platform                |
| <b>SMEs</b>     | small and medium enterprises   |
| <b>STDF</b>     | WTO Standards and Trade Development Facility                         |
| <b>STM</b>      | Stocktaking Moment   |
| <b>TWG</b>      | technical working group  |
| <b>UNIDO</b>    | United Nations Industrial Development Organization                   |
| <b>USAID</b>    | United States Agency for International Development                   |
| <b>USDA</b>     | United States Department of Agriculture                              |
| <b>VAT</b>      | value-added tax  |
| <b>WB</b>       | World Bank   |
| <b>WFP</b>      | World Food Programme   |
| <b>WHO</b>      | World Health Organization  |
| <b>WHO EMRO</b> | WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean                    |
| <b>WTO</b>      | World Trade Organization   |

# SUMMARY

Global food prices remained relatively stable during the first half of this year. However, global export prices of major cereals have been rising in recent months. Inflation continues to ease in most regional countries. Still, inflation is proving persistent in some economies, including Egypt, Lebanon, the Sudan and Yemen, largely because of country-specific factors.

In North Africa, the impact of climate change is starkly evident as wheat yields are projected to be well below-average in Morocco and below-average in northwestern Algeria. This is primarily due to a prolonged seasonal drought, a clear indication of the region's vulnerability to such weather events. On the other hand, in the Near East, winter cereal production is expected to be above-average, offering a more positive outlook.

Looking ahead, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) anticipates a 5 percent decrease in wheat production (16.37 million tonnes) in Northern Africa for 2023/24, which could lead to a 4 percent increase in import requirements. However, the Near East presents a significantly more optimistic picture, with a projected 19.2 percent increase in wheat production and a substantial 20 percent decrease in import requirements for 2023/24.

The region has five hunger hotspots: Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Yemen. Palestine and the Sudan are at the highest concern level. Gaza's entire population is experiencing high levels of food insecurity at Phase 3 (Crisis) or higher. Furthermore, 57.3 percent of the croplands were damaged during the war. In the Sudan, 37 percent of the population is facing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above). The Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen are hotspots of very high concern; they have a high number of people projected to face or facing critical levels of acute food insecurity with worsening drivers. In Lebanon, 23 percent of the population is facing Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) levels of acute food insecurity.

Countries in the region are taking proactive measures to address the food security situation. Egypt and Mauritania are focusing on expanding wheat production. Egypt is aiming to increase both wheat and corn production, reclaim land and enhance storage capacities. Saudi Arabia is diversifying its food production by boosting seafood production and increasing coffee production. Iraq and Morocco are expanding fertilizer production capacities to strengthen agricultural capacities. The United Arab Emirates is boosting its milk production.

Many non-oil exporting countries in the region are struggling with high debt levels. The financial strains have negative effects on currency values and the affordability of critical imports such as food. In such difficult circumstances, the Egyptian Government has raised the price of state-subsidized bread for the first time in more than 30 years by fourfold (from 5 piastres to 20 piastres per loaf).

In terms of commercial relations, Egypt implemented trade-restricting measures by extending its export ban on sugar, Mauritania increased customs tariffs on Moroccan fruits and vegetables, and the Sudan increased customs tariffs due to escalating military costs.

Trade-facilitating measures included Egypt's conclusion of the export ban on onions and Iraq's reduction of customs tariffs on live animals. Morocco is increasing grain subsidies to boost grain imports.

Due to the Red Sea crisis, countries are diversifying their exports towards new or increasing markets: Morocco towards Canada in fruits and vegetables, and Egypt towards Canada and Brazil with increased citrus exports. On the other hand, Russia is expanding its market presence in Algeria (dairy).

The United Arab Emirates is further casting its trade net with new free trade agreements, such as with Armenia, Kenya, New Zealand and South Korea. In addition, it hosted the World Trade Organization's 13th Ministerial Conference and established the Fresh Corridor 2.0 to encourage food trade between the United Arab Emirates and the rest of the world. It has also invested in agricultural assets globally by acquiring premium blueberry and avocado-producing Peruvian companies.

The region has continued to implement climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. Due to droughts, Morocco is expanding vegetable production in mountain areas, in addition to developing drought-resistant plants and suspending watermelon production. Tunisia has raised the price of drinking water. Saudi Arabia has developed banana varieties tailored to its climate by plant tissue culture and biotechnology.

As new, sustainable agricultural practices, the following measures have been put into practice: sustainable farming (Bahrain), development of the carbon credit industry (Iraq), issuing green bonds (Kuwait), reforestation (Libya, Saudi Arabia), and implementing vertical hydroponic farming (United Arab Emirates) and leveraging information and communication technologies (ICT) and artificial intelligence (AI) to advance sustainable farming practices. International cooperation is also pursued to implement smart farm innovations (South Korea–Qatar).

Policies to improve water usage include constructing water harvesting dams (Iraq, Mauritania), leveraging geospatial information on water resource management (Libya), increasing water desalination capacities (Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia) including through the use of solar energy (Oman), as well as enhancing water reuse infrastructure (Saudi Arabia).

Countries are also combatting food loss and waste by developing waste collection and recycling practices using blockchain technology (Egypt) and improving consumer behaviour to reduce waste (Jordan).

This bulletin<sup>1</sup> provides an overview of the regional food safety status, the challenges faced and the necessary actions. Food safety hazards are increasingly recognized as a significant global public health problem. To achieve optimum human health and well-being, consumers must have access to diverse foodstuffs that are well-nourishing and free from foodborne diseases (FBD).

Despite the region's food safety management systems, consumers face a high risk of exposure to contaminated food and foodborne diseases due to factors such as tropical climate, which fosters the proliferation of pests and naturally occurring toxins, and the use of unsafe water supplies for irrigation and food washing. Additionally, weak infrastructure, including storage, roads and cold chains contributes to the rise in food spoilage, which is expected to worsen with climate change.

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<sup>1</sup> This Bulletin is intended to cover the countries of the Near East and North Africa (NENA) and Arab region: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The terms NENA region and Arab region are used interchangeably.

FAO has recently undertaken a food safety and quality mapping in the region. This bulletin presents its findings and the strategies and actions needed to provide safe food to consumers. It also enumerates some recent FAO programmes that support food safety in the region.



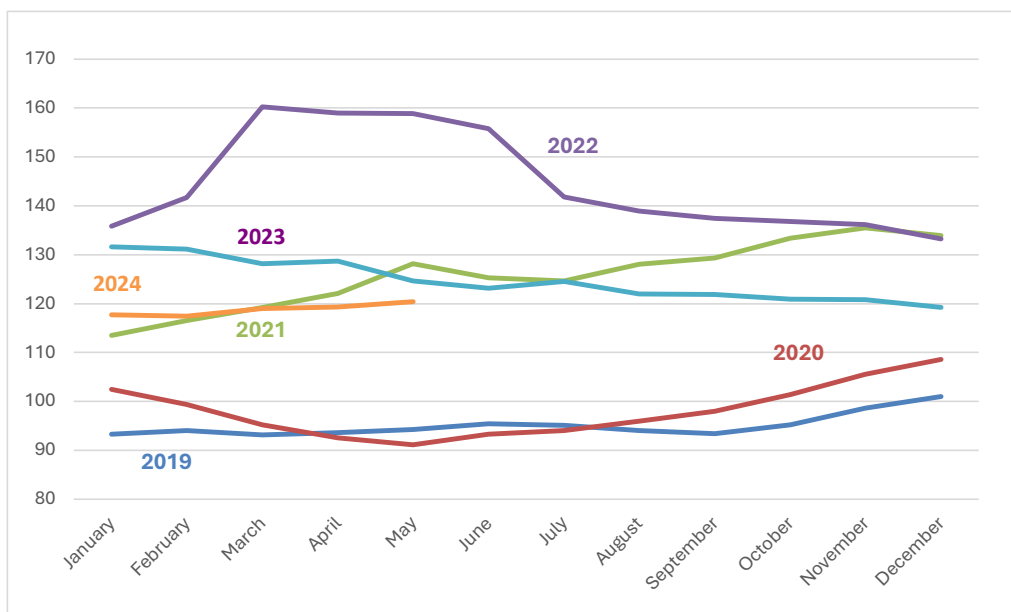
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# SECTION I: FOOD MARKETS AND FOOD SECURITY SITUATION

## Global food markets

The **FAO Food Price Index** was 120.6 points in June 2024, when **world food prices** were 2.1 percent lower than in June 2023 (Figure 1). World food prices are below their 2022–2024 levels; however still above their 2019–2020 levels.

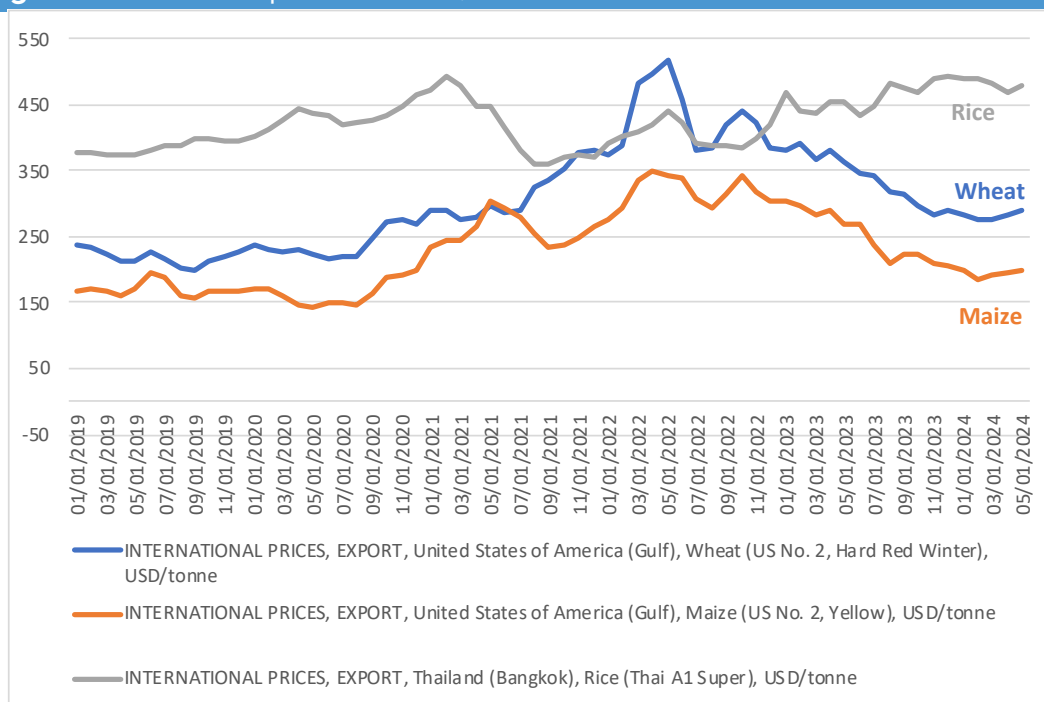
**Figure 1.** FAO Food Price Index



Source: FAO. 2024. FAO Food Price Index. In: *Food and Agriculture Organization*. Rome. [Cited 10 June 2024]. <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>

FAO's latest forecasts point to **increases in production and higher closing stocks across basic foodstuffs**. However, global food production systems remain vulnerable to shocks stemming from extreme weather events, geopolitical tensions, policy changes and developments in other markets.

**Figure 2. International prices of wheat, corn and rice (USD/tonne)**



Source: FAO. Food Price Monitoring and Analysis (FPMA) tool, International price series. In: *Food and Agriculture Organization*. Rome. [Cited 10 June 2024]. <https://fpma.fao.org/giews/fpmat4/#/dashboard/tool/international>

**International prices of wheat and maize have fallen significantly from their peak in 2022**, while that of rice continues to be high (Figure 2). In May 2024, international prices of wheat (US No. 2, Hard Red Winter) and corn (US No. 2, Yellow) were 20.1 percent and 26.2 percent below their value in May 2023, respectively. International rice prices have remained elevated amid lingering export curbs and strong purchases by some Asian countries.

Global export prices of all major cereals rose in recent months, with wheat prices increasing the most. The rise in wheat prices was largely due to growing concerns about unfavourable crop conditions for the 2024 harvests, including in parts of Europe, Northern America and the Black Sea region. Additionally, damage to the Black Sea shipping infrastructure exacerbated the upward pressure on prices. The increase in maize export prices reflects production concerns in Latin America, along with limited farmer selling activity in Ukraine amid a strong global demand.

Global wheat production is expected to be 789 million tonnes in 2024, around the previous season's level.

In May 2024, the World Bank (WB) natural gas index fell back to May 2021 levels (Figure A1). Fertilizer prices continued their downward trend since their peak in April 2022. However, they

remain above their levels in 2020. In February 2024, diammonium phosphate (DAP) prices were 45.3 percent, urea prices 69.2 percent and potassium chloride prices 74.5 percent lower compared to their peak levels in 2022 (Figure A2).

The WB anticipates a decline in the global food price index of 6 percent in 2024 and an additional 4 percent in 2025. This projection encompasses lower prices for grains, oils and meals, and slightly higher prices for other food categories in 2024, followed by broad-based declines in 2025. Wheat prices are forecasted by WB to drop by 15 percent in 2024, reflecting an increase in production, whereas maize prices are expected to decrease by 21 percent owing to an increase in global supply, although potential disruptions in grain shipments and shifts in input costs present significant upside risks to the forecasts.

## Regional food prices pointing downward

The conflict in Gaza and Israel is yet another shock to the Middle East and North Africa region. Projected growth in the region this year is downgraded by 0.5 percentage points to 2.9 percent by the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) January 2024 Regional Economic Outlook. **Inflation continues to ease in most regional economies.** Still, inflation is proving persistent in some economies, largely because of country-specific factors, including those related to foreign exchange shortages (Egypt) and monetary financing and cost-push pressures (the Sudan). Food price inflation remains elevated in Lebanon. IMF forecasts 14.4 percent inflation for the region in 2024, a lower rate compared to 16.5 percent in 2023.

Based on the [FAO Nowcasting Tool](#), the **food consumer price index was 9.4 percent in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region** as of 19 June 2024. Within the region<sup>2</sup> (Figure 3) as of 6 March 2024, the 6-month moving average food consumer price indexes are as follows: Algeria (3.62 percent), Bahrain (7.60 percent), Djibouti (9.15 percent), Egypt (30.25 percent), Iraq (11.48 percent), Jordan (5.23 percent), Kuwait (7.80 percent), Lebanon (35.57 percent), Libya (4.80 percent), Mauritania (3.43 percent), Morocco (3.77 percent), Oman (4.26 percent), Palestine-West Bank (40.28 percent), Qatar (4.67 percent), Saudi Arabia (3.08 percent), Tunisia (10.79 percent) and the United Arab Emirates (8.11 percent).

<sup>2</sup> The maps presented in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of FAO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, or the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

**Figure 3.** Expected year-over-year food price variation map (FAO Data Lab)



Source: FAO. 2024. Data Lab. In: *Food and Agriculture Organization*. Rome. [Cited 10 June 2024]. [http://foodandagricultureorganization.shinyapps.io/dl\\_foodprices/](http://foodandagricultureorganization.shinyapps.io/dl_foodprices/)

*Note:* The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined.

**In most countries of the region, food prices show a steady or decreasing trend**, with the exception of Yemen, where they show an acceleration (Figure 4) based on the [FAO Daily Food Prices Acceleration Monitor](#). In Yemen, anticipated increases in freight and insurance costs due to the Red Sea crisis are expected to push up the cost of staple foods and other imports.

**Figure 4.** FAO Daily Food Prices Acceleration Monitor



Source: FAO. 2023. Data Lab. In: *Food and Agriculture Organization*. Rome. [Cited 10 June 2024]. [foodandagricultureorganization.shinyapps.io/dl\\_foodprices/](http://foodandagricultureorganization.shinyapps.io/dl_foodprices/)

*Note:* The Daily Food Prices Acceleration Monitor developed by [FAO's Data Lab](#) aims to detect abnormal growth and acceleration in daily food prices on a basket composed of 14 commodities derived from a crowdsourcing platform ([Numbco](#)).

The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined.

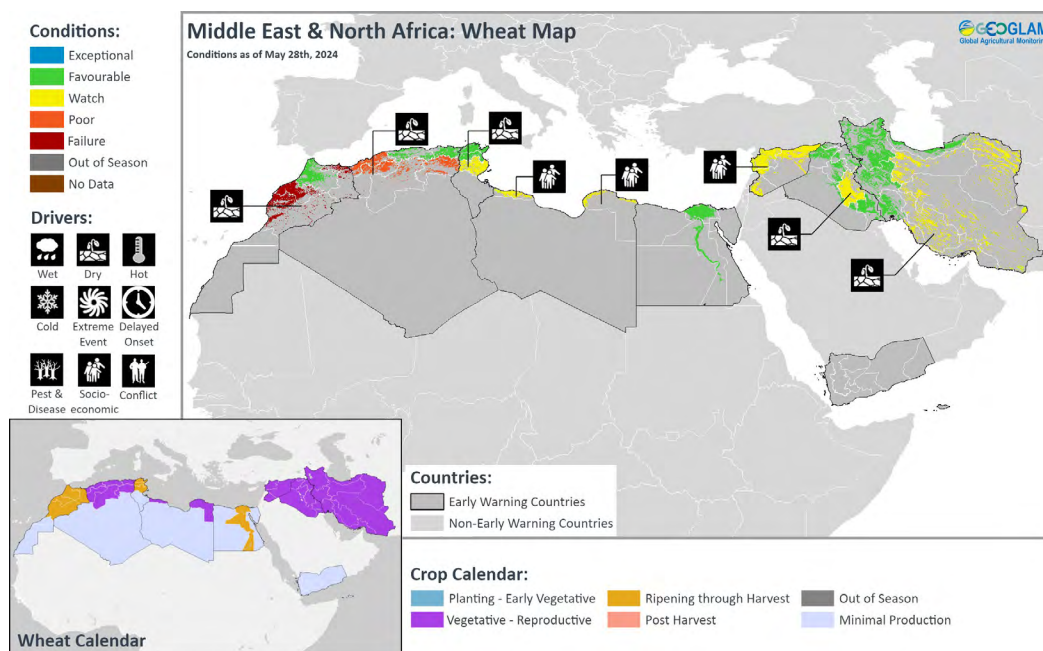


Due to a gas shortage crisis, fertilizer prices in the free market rose by about 54 percent in June 2024 in Egypt, reaching EGP 20 000 per tonne compared to EGP 13 000 per tonne in May 2024. As a consequence, several fertilizer producers stopped production at a time when the demand for fertilizer for summer crops was increasing. The Egyptian Government was forced to import liquified gas to ease the gas shortage, which increased the cost of fertilizer production. The Egyptian Farmers Syndicate expect the price of summer crops, such as tomatoes, grains, rice and corn to rise by 25 percent due to disruptions in fertilizer production.

## Below-average yields in North Africa

In western North Africa, yields were severely affected by drought this season, particularly in Morocco and northwestern Algeria, where significant yield reductions resulted. Well-below-average yields are expected in Morocco, while near-average yields are expected elsewhere in North Africa.

Figure 5. Crop conditions



Source: GEOGLAM. Crop Monitor Early Warning. No. 94. June 2024. [Cited 10 June 2024]. [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/636c12f79c2561de642a866/t/6661d0506ca4026fd2492703/1717686354755/EarlyWarning\\_CropMonitor\\_202406.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/636c12f79c2561de642a866/t/6661d0506ca4026fd2492703/1717686354755/EarlyWarning_CropMonitor_202406.pdf)

Note: The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. The final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined.

In **Morocco**, wheat yields are expected to be 24 percent below-average due to drought from December 2023 through February 2024 combined with above-average temperatures. However, conditions remain favourable in the northern tip of the country due to abundant rains.

In **Algeria**, initial sowing of winter cereals was delayed by limited rains and high temperatures at the beginning of the season. In the northwest, where crops are typically sown in October and November, a combination of erratic and below-average rains, and hot temperatures significantly impacted crop development. Conversely, in the northeast and north-centre, where crops are typically sown later in December, increased rains in November and December 2023 brought some reprieve. Additional rains in February, and again in late April through mid-May allowed crops to adequately recover from early-season dryness in these areas. Yield at the national scale is expected to be near-average as reductions in the northwest are expected to be offset by a likely surplus in the northeast and north-centre.

In **Tunisia**, a combination of good rainfall distribution in February and March, constant rainfall between April and mid-May, and warm temperatures benefitted crop development, including in the north-centre. As a result, **final yields are estimated to be 9 percent above-average** at the national level.

In **Libya**, warmer-than-normal temperatures during the flowering stage negatively impacted crops in the northwest. Conversely, crop biomass is near-average in the main producing northeast, and overall yields are expected to be near-average at the national level.

In **Egypt**, recent warmer-than-normal temperatures benefitted the flowering, grain filling and ripening stages of crop development.

In the **Near East**, **winter cereal production is expected to be above-average** despite irrigation restrictions in Iraq. In **Iraq**, conditions are mixed with concern in parts of Qadissiya and neighbouring provinces of central-eastern Iraq where restrictions on irrigation impacted sowing activities. However, winter cereal production is expected to be above-average at the country level in the **Syrian Arab Republic** and Iraq as the areas of concern are not expected to largely impact overall harvesting outcomes.

In **Yemen**, sorghum planting continues under mixed conditions. Near-average rainfall received for the March-to-May first rainy season is expected to support normal planting activities as well as the replenishment of livestock pasture. However, the rains also resulted in moderate flooding during March and April, particularly in the minor-producing eastern half of the country, which caused subsequent trade disruptions. Additionally, pockets of rainfall deficits have emerged in some central and western producing areas. Land preparation is underway for spring wheat, and planting begins in June.

In the **Sudan**, the planting of main-season millet and sorghum crops began in June. However, the ongoing conflict situation continues to impact farmers' access to fields, as well as access to credit and agricultural inputs, leading to inflated production and transportation costs. The situation is expected to severely reduce agricultural income and harvest outcomes.

**The USDA foresees 5 percent less wheat production** (16.37 million tonnes) in **Northern African countries for 2023/24 compared to 2022/23** (17.24 million tonnes) (Table 1). This will **increase import requirements** by 4 percent in 2023/24. **In the Near East**, the USDA predicts **19.2 percent higher wheat production and 20 percent less import requirements for 2023/24** compared to 2022/23.

**Table 1.** World wheat supply and use estimations for 2022/23 and 2023/24 (million tonnes)

| 2022/23             | Beginning stocks | Production | Imports | Domestic feed | Domestic total 2/ | Exports | Ending stocks |
|---------------------|------------------|------------|---------|---------------|-------------------|---------|---------------|
| World 3/            | 273.26           | 789.2      | 212.06  | 154.91        | 791.42            | 220.66  | 271.04        |
| North Africa 7/     | 12.72            | 17.24      | 29.68   | 1.67          | 46.62             | 0.77    | 12.25         |
| Selected Mideast 8/ | 10.22            | 17.43      | 24.71   | 3.58          | 39.44             | 0.65    | 12.26         |
| <b>2023/24 Est</b>  |                  |            |         |               |                   |         |               |
| World 3/            | 271.04           | 787.59     | 217.2   | 158.5         | 799.08            | 218.95  | 259.56        |
| North Africa 7/     | 12.25            | 16.37      | 30.9    | 1.75          | 46.85             | 1.8     | 10.87         |
| Selected Mideast 8/ | 12.26            | 20.77      | 19.77   | 3.02          | 39.52             | 0.76    | 12.52         |

Source: USDA. 2024. *World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE)*, No. 649, 12 June 2024. Washington, DC, USDA. [Cited 10 June 2024]. <https://www.usda.gov/oce/commodity/wasde/wasde0624.pdf>

Note: 1/ Aggregate of local marketing years. 2/ Total foreign and world use adjusted to reflect the differences in world imports and exports. 3/ World imports and exports may not balance due to differences in marketing years, grain in transit, and reporting discrepancies in some countries. 7/ Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. 8/ Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, United Arab Emirates and Oman

## Regional food security situation

Based on the latest [FAO–WFP early warnings on acute food insecurity](#), of the 18 global hotspots, **five hunger hotspots** (Lebanon, Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen) are in the NENA region.

This category includes hotspots with Famine or Risk of Famine, or populations already in Catastrophe (Phase 5<sup>3</sup>) or at risk of deterioration towards catastrophic conditions during the outlook period. Palestine and the Sudan are at the highest concern level.

In **Gaza**, the conflict has resulted in an unprecedented death toll, destruction and mass displacement, combined with heavy restrictions on commercial goods, while humanitarian assistance faces extreme access constraints. As of 20 June 2024, the ongoing hostilities have reportedly caused [more than 122 000 casualties within the Gaza Strip](#) – more than 5 percent of the total population. The food security situation in Gaza continues to be catastrophic. According to the latest IPC analysis, [the whole population of Gaza is experiencing high levels of food insecurity at Phase 3 \(Crisis\) or higher](#). Half of the Gaza Strip's population (1.11 million people) is expected to face catastrophic conditions (IPC Phase 5), the most severe level in the IPC Acute Food Insecurity scale.

The hostilities have caused widespread damage to assets and infrastructure indispensable to survival. As of 20 May 2024, [57.3 percent \(8 660 ha\) of all cropland has been damaged](#). Home barns (537), broiler farms (484) and sheep farms (397) were the most [damaged agricultural](#)

<sup>3</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification ([IPC Acute Food Insecurity \(AFI\) and Cadre Harmonisé \(CH\) classification](#)) provides differentiation between different levels of severity of acute food insecurity, classifying units of analysis in five distinct phases: (1) Minimal/None, (2) Stressed, (3) Crisis, (4) Emergency, (5) Catastrophe/Famine.

[infrastructures](#). The conflict can also exacerbate already high food security needs in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Conflict and displacement also continue at an alarming pace and magnitude in the **Sudan**. The already critical levels of acute food insecurity could deteriorate towards catastrophic outcomes, driven by the escalating conflict. A major food deficit is expected this year as the conflict and resulting disruptions severely lower agricultural production while increasing challenges in receiving and financing imports escalate shortages and result in soaring prices. The IPC analysis released in May 2024 projected that, between June and September 2024, [over half of the population \(25.6 million people\) will face high levels of acute food insecurity](#) (IPC Phase 3 or above), of which 8.5 million (18 percent) is in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency).

The Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen are hotspots of very high concern. Both countries have a high number of people facing or projected to face critical levels of acute food insecurity, coupled with worsening drivers that are expected to further exacerbate life-threatening conditions in the coming months.

In the **Syrian Arab Republic**, a further deterioration of the economy is likely to underpin increasing levels of acute food insecurity. The situation will be exacerbated by a spate of hostilities in the northwest Syrian Arab Republic, the risk of conflict escalation within the broader regional crisis, and substantial funding cuts. Between August and September 2023, 12.9 million people (55 percent of the population) were facing high levels of acute food insecurity, based on WFP's CARI methodology.<sup>4</sup>

The food security situation is expected to deteriorate in **Yemen** as a result of the protracted economic crisis, worsened by hostilities in the Red Sea and reduced humanitarian assistance. In areas under the control of the Government of Yemen, nearly 1.3 million people (13 percent of the population analysed) were estimated to be in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) between October 2023 and February 2024. In several areas, 20 percent of the population was projected to be critically acute food insecure.

Since October 2023, **Lebanon** has been added to the list of hunger hotspots. Acute food insecurity is likely to deteriorate amid economic stagnation, diminishing humanitarian assistance and the risk of a military escalation in southern Lebanon. 1.3 million people (23 percent of the population), encompassing Lebanese citizens, and Syrian and Palestinian refugees, are projected to face Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) levels of acute food insecurity between April and September 2024. The anticipated end of bread subsidies in September 2024, expected following the exhaustion of the World Bank loan currently financing them, is likely to raise prices for essential items.

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<sup>4</sup> The Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators for Food Security (CARI) is a harmonized WFP (World Food Programme) method used to analyse primary data from a single households food security survey, and to classify individual households according to their level of food security. It can also be used to carry out vulnerability profiling of households and to identify targeting criteria for WFP programming.



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## SECTION II: REGIONAL FOOD POLICY-RELATED DEVELOPMENTS

### Algeria

In March, the Algerian Interprofessional Cereals Office [announced a reduction in prices of rice and pulses](#), effective from 3 March 2024. This reduction followed the government's decision to eliminate the 9 percent value-added tax (VAT) previously applied to these essential goods.

The Algerian Energy Company, which has been tasked with the construction progress of five new seawater desalination stations across five coastal provinces in Algeria, [announced that the project's progress exceeded 50 percent](#) in April. These stations, each with a production capacity of 300 000 m<sup>3</sup> per day, are scheduled to become operational by December 2024.

[Russia is eyeing Algeria as a prime market for expanding its dairy exports](#) due to its status as the largest African importer of dairy products, spending approximately USD 800 million yearly on milk powder imports alone.

### Bahrain

The Bahrain Real Estate Investment Company (Edamah), in collaboration with Badia Farms, a leading controlled environment food producer, [unveiled plans for a new sustainable farm](#) in Bahrain in March. Badia Farms, renowned for its mission-driven sustainability efforts, will invest millions of US dollars in the project, leasing a 50 000 m<sup>2</sup> area from Edamah to implement cutting-edge hydroponic farming techniques.

In May, Bahrain Flour Mills Co., a Bahraini public shareholding company, [planned to construct a new, cutting-edge flour mill and prioritize digital transformation to meet Bahrain's flour demands](#). The company is embracing digital solutions, transitioning to a new ERP system and establishing an e-commerce platform to enhance customer experiences.

## Egypt

Egypt has [increased the local wheat procurement price by 25 percent for the 2024/25 season](#) to encourage farmers to sell to the state and reduce reliance on imports. The Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade aims to [increase wheat production by 53 percent and corn production by 56 percent by 2025/26](#) with the goal of substantially reducing dependency on foreign markets. The government is gearing up to [plant 3.5 million feddans \(1.47 million hectares\) of wheat in the upcoming fiscal year 2024/25](#), marking an increase from the current year's 3.2 million feddans. The target aims to boost wheat storage capacity to 5.2 million tonnes, reducing imports and fostering agricultural self-sufficiency. The government has also [launched the first phase of the Future of Egypt initiative](#), aiming to reclaim 1.8 million hectares of land by 2030; the initiative also involves the construction of 24 grain silos with a combined capacity of over 100 000 tonnes, equipped with drying units to minimize post-harvest losses.

To bolster wheat reserves, the government announced in February that it invested USD 145.6 million, with support from the French Development Agency, to [establish six new wheat silos in 2024](#). This project aimed to increase the country's wheat storage capacity by 420 000 tonnes, aligning with plans to expand state-owned silo capacity to between 6.4 and 7 million tonnes within the next few years. Feerum Egypt, a prominent player in the grain storage industry, also announced that it is investing USD 33 million in [establishing a cutting-edge factory dedicated to grain storage silos in Egypt's East Port Said region](#). Bühler Group, a Swiss milling technology provider, partnered with Elsewedy Electric and IBC Group (IBC) to [advance Egypt's grain silo localization efforts](#) in May 2024.

Egypt's agricultural sector soared to new heights in 2023, achieving record exports of 7.5 million tonnes valued at USD 8.8 billion. Led by oranges, [Egypt's 2024 first-quarter agricultural exports surpassed USD 1.5 billion in 2024](#), reflecting a substantial increase of USD 300 million compared to the previous year. The Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation attributed this success to concerted efforts over the past decade, including market diversification, the opening of 95 new markets and the diversification of exports to encompass over 400 agricultural products shipped to 160 nations worldwide. The conclusion of Ramadan brought about a [surge in demand for Egyptian citrus, particularly from Arab nations like Saudi Arabia and Jordan, along with some European countries](#). However, the usual Asian demand by the Muslim population (such as in Malaysia and Indonesia, India and Bangladesh) associated with Ramadan was notably absent this season due to disruptions in shipping lines caused by the Red Sea crisis. On the other hand, as a result of economic challenges, Egypt [saw a 40 percent decline in commodity imports in January due to US dollar scarcity and import restrictions](#).

[Fresh, frozen and dried fruit and vegetable exports to Germany reached a record 190 thousand tonnes in 2023](#), a 25 percent increase from the previous year. Furthermore, in response to trade route disturbance in the Red Sea, Egyptian [citrus exporters are diversifying their markets, with new ventures in Brazil and Canada](#) showing promise despite competition from other countries. Egypt's export relationship with Canada, in particular, has strengthened, with [citrus exports more than doubling compared to the previous year](#). Egyptian exporters [venturing into new markets with the export of potatoes to Morocco and strawberries to Canada for the first time](#); this success hopes to strengthen foreign currency reserves through agricultural initiatives. The Egyptian-Swiss Group aims to [double its pasta exports to Saudi Arabia in 2024 while expanding into the Gulf countries and the broader Middle East region](#).

The Ministry of Agriculture announced in March that it had [allocated EGP 307.35 million to support small-scale breeders and recent graduates](#) as part of the national cattle fattening project under the Decent Life campaign. This initiative aims to enhance meat and dairy production, stabilize prices, and uplift rural livelihoods.

Efforts to boost local sugar production are also underway, with the Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade [targeting to produce 140 000 tonnes of sugar from sugar beet crops](#) to address shortages and stabilize prices. The ministry has announced additional incentives per tonne of sugar beet delivered to state-owned factories to encourage farmers.

Highlighting the importance of trade and balancing domestic production, Egypt [extended its ban on sugar exports for another 3 months](#) to ensure adequate domestic supply amid soaring prices. In April, the government [announced that the 6-month ban on onion exports was concluded](#). With production reaching 3 million tonnes this season, an increase of 1 million tonnes from the previous year, Egypt became well-positioned to meet both domestic needs and export demands. [Demand for Egyptian onions surged in the Netherlands](#), driven by interest from Dutch importers following the Fruit Logistica trade show.

Environmental sustainability and waste management are also being prioritized through initiatives like the [SIG partnership with Plastic Bank and GIZ to improve waste collection and recycling practices using blockchain technology](#). This project aims to collect 700 metric tonnes of beverage cartons over 3 years, benefiting around 1 000 waste collectors.

The Egyptian government [significantly increased the price of state-subsidized bread](#), raising it from 5 piastres to 20 piastres per loaf starting 1 June. Over 70 million Egyptians are entitled to subsidized bread; the adjustment marks the first in more than 30 years. The government also hinted at [an imminent reduction in state subsidies on essential commodities such as diesel subsidies](#) by the beginning of the 2025/26 fiscal year. The potential subsidy reduction has sparked concerns among the population, particularly among the underprivileged who rely heavily on these support systems.

## Jordan

In March, the Jordan Farmers Union sounded the alarm on a [grave threat to the nation's potato yield](#) as late blight, a fungal disease, ravages potato crops across the Jordan Valley. With over 10 000 dunams (1 000 hectares) already affected, the agricultural sector is grappling with substantial losses amounting to millions of dinars. As a result, potato production has plummeted by an estimated 80 percent, raising concerns about potential shortages and price hikes for consumers.

Jordan is intensifying its efforts to combat food waste with the [launch of the "No to Food Waste" initiative](#). The initiative aims to change public behaviour leading to food wastage through innovative solutions and enhanced public awareness. Supported by entrepreneurial and research tracks, the campaign seeks to establish a national waste index and foster a culture of responsible consumption across various sectors.

## Iraq

In March, the Ministry of Water Resources announced plans to [construct over 36 water harvesting dams](#) to address storage capacity issues and improve water resource management, supporting agricultural irrigation, groundwater replenishment and regional settlement stability. Concurrently, the Ministry of Commerce is [building 4 silos and 17 underground bunkers across six governorates](#) to boost grain and cereal storage capacity, anticipating increased wheat production due to improved rainfall and modern farming practices.

The Iraqi Prime Minister [inaugurated two fertilizer factories in Basra to strengthen agricultural capabilities](#) by meeting fertilizer demands and reducing import reliance. These factories will produce significant quantities of urea and DAP fertilizers. In addition, in May 2024, Iraq [signed three major agreements with companies in Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States of America for sulfur and fertilizer projects](#). These include a 240 000 tonne per year fertilizer plant in Northern Baiji, a 2.5 million tonne sulfur plant in Northern Nineveh by a US firm, and the rehabilitation of a war-damaged sulfur plant in Al-Mishraq near Mosul by the Iraqi AL-Rafidain Group with a 1.5 million tonne annual capacity.

The Ministerial Economic Council has [reduced customs duties on live animals imported for slaughter or breeding to stimulate the livestock sector](#). Tariffs are set at 2 percent for slaughter and 5 percent for breeding purposes, supporting both immediate consumption and long-term breeding programmes.

Capturiant, renowned as the world's pioneer energy-derived carbon credit and environmental asset authenticator, registry, and regulated exchange, has [unveiled its inaugural Middle Eastern franchise in Iraq by announcing its collaboration with Sharp Mind Global Ventures Inc.](#) The partnership aims to revolutionize the carbon credit industry in Iraq, leveraging Capturiant's innovative platform and Sharp Mind's expertise in carbon neutrality strategies and decarbonization efforts.

## Kuwait

Kuwait's largest lender, National Bank of Kuwait (NBK), is gearing up to [issue its inaugural green bonds, marking a significant step towards sustainable finance](#). The bank intends to launch 6-year, non-callable for 5-year green bonds.

## Lebanon

The Lebanese Avocado Association [reported a significant rise in avocado export revenues in March, from 40 tonnes in 2020 to 1 000 tonnes in 2023](#), marking considerable progress for the agricultural and export sectors. In recent years, Lebanon has witnessed a remarkable surge in avocado production, leading to a substantial increase in exports, particularly to European markets. This growth is attributed to the adoption of international certifications and standards in avocado farming.



## Libya

In March 2024, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) [unveiled a groundbreaking initiative aimed at supporting data-driven agriculture in Libya](#). In collaboration with partners such as FAO, the Ministry of Water Resources and others, AICS launched a geospatial platform called MIRWAT-Libya. This platform will serve as a vital tool for informed decision-making in agricultural development by providing advanced information and data by leveraging geospatial information on water resource management and facilitating access to extensive spatial data.

In April 2024, the National Oil Corporation [launched the first phase of a campaign to plant one million trees across several regions](#). This initiative, part of the "Think About Tomorrow" programme, aims to reduce carbon emissions and increase green spaces in areas with limited forestation. In addition, the National Oil Corporation has [inked a deal to drill 17 water wells across various regions](#). Aimed at addressing water shortages in multiple areas, the agreement includes provisions for drilling and maintaining these wells.

Tatweer Research and the European Union in Libya [jointly launched the AgroLab programme in May 2024, aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and innovation within the agricultural sector in southern Libya](#). Targeting startups and individuals with agricultural project ideas, the programme offers various support activities, including capacity-building training and networking opportunities with experts and investors.

## Mauritania

The trade relationship between Morocco and Mauritania faced significant challenges in February, particularly impacting the exchange of fruits and vegetables. Reports indicate a notable decline of over 50 percent in Moroccan exports to Mauritania since the beginning of 2024 [attributed to substantial increases in customs tariffs imposed by Mauritanian authorities](#). The surge in transit costs, implemented by Mauritania to bolster domestic production and safeguard its economy, has prompted many Moroccan exporters to halt shipments, citing prohibitive expenses.

India was poised to enter a long-term contract with Mauritania for the [import of rock phosphate, a vital ingredient in fertilizers](#), amid disruptions caused by the Ukraine war and the Red Sea crisis.

In March 2024, the Ministry of Agriculture [launched the construction and rehabilitation of 13 agricultural dams and the fencing of 400 km of agricultural land in different localities of Hodh Charghi](#) as part of the programme to support the resilience of village communities. This programme aims to help 355 000 people in the different areas of the *wilaya*, through support for the means of agricultural production, the strengthening of health, education and other social infrastructures.

In April 2024, the Ministry of Agriculture announced the [successful completion of the first large-scale wheat cultivation experiment covering an area of 200 hectares](#). This initiative, conducted through a public-private partnership involving the National Society for Rural Development, the Timar group specializing in logistics and warehousing, and the Biladi Company for Agricultural and Animal Production, focused on two wheat varieties, yielding between 4 and 5 tonnes per hectare.

## Morocco

Grappling with the impact of a rain deficit on its agriculture yield, Morocco [introduced subsidies to encourage grain imports, particularly soft wheat](#), in February 2024. Morocco's greenhouse vegetable exports, once on a trajectory of rapid growth, are now [encountering setbacks attributed to climate change and weather-related events](#). The greenhouse industry, a significant contributor to the country's economy, has become increasingly vulnerable to factors like droughts, water scarcity and hurricanes, hindering export growth.

In response to ongoing drought challenges and diminishing water resources in Morocco's primary vegetable-growing regions, the emergence of the Green Ygran cooperative in Tata, a mountainous area traditionally limited to date cultivation, [signifies a significant shift towards exploring new agricultural production areas](#). The cooperative has initiated a 20-hectare commercial trial of various early vegetables, including peppers, beans, tomatoes and others.

Due to severe water stress, the [Moroccan watermelon season was completely suspended, resulting in an estimated loss of over 110 000 tonnes from the market](#). Despite the growth of commercial watermelon cultivation in recent years, ongoing drought conditions and climatic challenges have necessitated restrictive measures by local authorities, aiming to transition farmers to alternative crops.

Morocco's [ambitious water security plan was announced at the 10th World Water Forum](#). A new desalination plant near Casablanca, powered by renewable energy, will produce 300 million cubic metres of water annually by 2026.

Furthermore, the African Development Bank's (AfDB) [EUR 84 million fund](#) aims to enhance economic resilience against climate change, targeting 6.5 million rural residents.

Port International has partnered with Karam Green Agri in Agadir to [produce high-quality vegetables using sustainable practices](#), aiming to expand production by 60 to 80 hectares annually. In line with wider efforts of sustainability, the Moroccan Institute for Agricultural Research (NIAR) is [developing high-yield, drought-resistant crops](#) to boost production by 50 percent, aligning with the Green Generation 2020–2030 initiative.

Morocco's greenhouse tomato exports saw a [significant rebound in early 2024, increasing by 10 percent from the previous year](#) despite facing trade tensions with key European partners and tariffs increase by Mauritania.

In March 2024, EastFruit reported that Morocco has [consistently increased its fruit and vegetable exports to Canada for the fourth consecutive year](#), with shipments growing by 14 percent in volume and 33 percent in value annually from 2018 to 2023. In 2023, Moroccan exporters sent nearly 94 thousand tonnes of fresh, frozen and dried produce to Canada,

amounting to USD 95 million, a significant rise from 4 years prior when the figures stood at 56 thousand tonnes and USD 30 million.

Morocco has [achieved a significant milestone in the avocado export market by reaching its target of 60 000 tonnes during the 2023/24 season](#), marking a notable 33 percent increase from the previous season. This success positions Morocco as Africa's third-largest exporter of avocados, following Kenya and South Africa.

Moroccan grower Les Domaines [introduced its latest mandarin variety, SweetCott](#). The new variety extends the citrus season until May, boasts high yield potential, and promises an extended shelf life both on trees and in cold storage.

In April 2024, OCP Group, a global leader in plant nutrition and phosphate-based fertilizers, teamed up with Fortescue Energy, specializing in green energy, metals and technology, to establish a joint venture in Morocco [to provide green hydrogen, ammonia and fertilizers to Morocco, Europe and global markets while advancing renewable energy technologies](#).

Morocco's fertilizer giant OCP Group and USAID have [launched a USD 100 million partnership to optimize fertilizer use and improve soil fertility in Africa](#) through innovative tools and geospatial technology.

In May 2024, Forafric Maroc announced that it is [expanding its wheat crushing capacity by 600 tonnes per day through a 10-year lease of a milling facility in the Meknes-Fes region](#), reinforcing its position as the country's largest milling company.

Other value chain developments include [the establishment of Alonso Forwarding Morocco by Spain's Alonso Group to facilitate cargo exchanges between Morocco and Europe](#), with plans for a second office in Tangiers.

Additionally, several agricultural development projects were [launched in Rhamna and Kelâa des Sraghna](#) aimed at water conservation, solidarity agriculture and the modernization of marketing infrastructures.

## Oman

In May 2024, Oman was preparing to [launch a groundbreaking solar thermal-powered desalination plant](#), a collaborative effort between ARA Petroleum and Austrian solar tech startup Heliavis. This innovative facility, located in the Qarat Al Milh site, aims to convert highly saline water into drinking water using solar energy.

## Qatar

Driven by a passion for promoting a plant-based lifestyle while blending vegan principles with local culture and flavours, the owner of Evergreen Organics, Ghanim Al Sulaiti, [organized Qatar's First Vegan Festival](#), showcasing the country's growing vegan community, affirming the demand for plant-based options.

Further strengthening local agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs announced that it [convened the first Korea–Qatar Smart Farm Cooperation Committee in Doha aiming to facilitate exchanges and cooperation in smart agriculture between the two nations](#). During the meeting, a proposal was made to establish an innovation valley in Qatar based on the Korean smart farm innovation valley model.

In May 2024, Qatari scientists pioneered a groundbreaking solution to address food waste and enhance sustainability in the nation's livestock sector. Led by the Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute, the project aims to [utilize biogas for microbial fermentation](#), converting biomethane into protein-rich feed, and reducing reliance on imported livestock feed.

## Saudi Arabia

In March 2024, Saudi Arabia [exported fresh tomatoes to Europe for the first time, overcoming its arid climate and traditional reliance on imports](#). This achievement was spearheaded by Dava Agricultural Co., which employs advanced greenhouses and vertical farming techniques. With support from government entities like the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture, as well as Saudi Export and Saudi Cargo, Dava successfully shipped 5 tonnes of tomatoes to Europe in collaboration with Dutch company Lehmann & Troost.

The Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture embarked on a significant initiative in April 2024 aimed at [localizing the production of banana seedlings, with a particular focus on the Jazan region](#). Leveraging advanced tissue culture and propagation techniques, the ministry's centre for plant tissue culture and biotechnology successfully cultivated various banana varieties tailored to Saudi Arabia's climate.

LG Chem, in collaboration with Alkhorayef Group, announced in May 2024 that it would [establish its first international water-desalination device plant in Saudi Arabia by 2026 with a USD 86 million investment](#). This plant aims to support Saudi Vision 2030 by localizing strategic industries and enhancing the non-oil sector GDP.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia plans to invest USD 4 billion in 96 projects to [enhance water reuse infrastructure across agricultural, urban and industrial sectors](#), targeting a 70 percent reuse rate by 2030.

To meet the rising domestic demand for seafood, Saudi Arabia plans to boost seafood production to 230 000 metric tonnes in 2024 by [developing 16 fishing ports along its 2 500 km coastline](#). The government is also offering financial incentives to encourage private investment in fisheries.

In another significant move, the Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu has [licensed the Saudi Coffee Company to construct the first coffee-production factory in Jazan](#). The factory will produce and export premium Saudi coffee varieties.

To enhance the honey sector, the Reef Saudi programme has allocated SAR 140 million (USD 37 million) with the aim of boosting annual production to 7 500 tonnes by 2026 [through initiatives such as queen bee breeding stations and mobile laboratories for bee health](#).

Looking towards the long term, Saudi Arabia has [committed USD 2.5 billion to the Middle East Green Initiative](#), a major step in its climate change strategy. Saudi Arabia's efforts include afforestation programmes central to both environmental sustainability and the ambitious Saudi Vision 2030 Agenda.

## Sudan

In February 2024, the acting government in army-controlled areas [implemented new duties on essential commodities and raised customs tariffs on imports](#) in response to escalating military costs, leading to a renewed surge in prices for the public. This abrupt imposition of duties on fuel, gas, wheat and medicine comes amid a backdrop of soaring exchange rates, with the US Dollar now trading at an unprecedented rate against the Sudanese Pound.

## Tunisia

In February 2024, Tunisia took a significant stride towards sustainable water management with the [signing of a 276 million dinars financing agreement with the AfDB](#). The agreement aims to bolster the Project to Improve the Quality of Purified Water for Better Resilience to Climate Change.

Further highlighting the emphasis of the Tunisian government on agriculture, there is a [significant 10.8 percent increase in agricultural support funds within the state budget for the year 2024 compared to the previous year's projections](#).

Regarding trade, the Ministries of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Trade and Industry [announced that private exporters are now authorized to export Tunisian olive oil in bulk to the European Union](#).

In March 2024, Tunisia [raised the price of drinking water by up to 16 percent in response to a 5-year drought and ongoing economic crisis](#). Despite recent increases in rainfall, Tunisian dams are only at 35 percent capacity. The price hike affects consumers exceeding certain consumption thresholds, with the highest increase of 16 percent applied to those using over 150 m<sup>3</sup> and tourist facilities.

The Assembly of People's Representatives announced in May 2024 that it is [examining a USD 300 million loan agreement with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for the Tunisia Emergency Food Security Response Project](#) aimed at ensuring grain supply and supporting urgent farmer needs from 2024 to 2026. In parallel, Tunisia [signed a financing agreement worth 100 million Tunisian dinars with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development](#) to support an integrated agricultural development project in the Wadi Tassa basin, focusing on land protection, hydraulic development and agricultural infrastructure improvement. Additionally, the Tunisian Solidarity Bank has [launched a seasonal credit programme in partnership with the Livestock Office and the Fodder Office](#) to support agriculture and livestock farming in Gafsa, providing loans to small farmers and cooperatives to promote sustainable agricultural development.

## United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates focused on several strategic initiatives relating to its trade relations in February. It [signed an agreement with Armenia](#) to liberalize trade, investment and services, reflecting a significant surge in economic ties. The country also [solidified a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement \(CEPA\) with Kenya](#) to safeguard supply chains, stimulate investment and enhance market access. The agreement is poised to foster innovation and sustainable growth, particularly in key sectors such as agriculture, technology and tourism. [Negotiations with New Zealand for a CEPA](#) aim to enhance market access and investment in sectors such as agriculture and renewable energy. Additionally, a [CEPA with South Korea](#) will eliminate tariffs on over 90 percent of imports over the next decade, fostering cooperation in key sectors and involving significant investment commitments. The United Arab Emirates reaffirmed its commitment to a sustainable global trading system by [pledging a USD 10 million grant to support vital World Trade Organization \(WTO\) initiatives](#). Ahead of hosting WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference, it aimed to modernize global trade rules and promote sustainable economic growth.

Additionally, Abu Dhabi-based logistics companies, including Etihad Cargo, [established the Fresh Corridor 2.0 to enhance food trade and investment diversification](#). The corridor will encourage two-way food trade between the United Arab Emirates and the rest of the world, positioning the country as a significant player in the global food supply chain.

In March 2024, the Unifrutti Group [finalized the acquisition of Bomarea and AvoAmerica Peru](#), securing 100 percent ownership of both entities in collaboration with Solum Partners and Alpine Fresh. With a combined area of nearly 2 000 hectares, these companies are renowned for producing premium blueberries and avocados in Peru, aligning perfectly with Unifrutti's goal to expand its presence in Peru and diversify its multi-fruit portfolio.

The Mleiha dairy farm project was announced in May 2024 and is set to [become the largest clean milk production project in the region](#), expanding from 1 250 to 5 000 cows and increasing daily milk production to 310 tonnes. This AED 600 million project focuses on A2A2 protein-rich milk, using cutting-edge technology for efficiency and animal welfare.

ARJ Holding LLC will [establish a compound fertilizer plant in Iraq's Salah al-Din province](#), producing 249 000 tonnes of fertilizers annually, including diammonium phosphate and urea. On the technological front, the United Arab Emirates is revolutionizing agriculture with ventures like [Pure Food Technology's vertical hydroponic farm in Dubai](#), employing robotics, solar power and artificial intelligence to cultivate crops like baby potatoes without soil. Emirates Integrated Telecommunications Company and Gracia Group have [launched an agritech platform leveraging ICT and AI to advance sustainable farming practices](#).

## Yemen

The Saudi Development and Reconstruction Programme for Yemen has partnered with the Selah Foundation to [launch a renewable-energy water-security project in Yemen's Hadhramaut region](#), benefiting 1.7 million people through solar-powered water stations.



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## SECTION III: FOOD SAFETY IN THE ARAB REGION: EXPLORING CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

### Background

Access to safe, nutritious and healthy food is a basic human right. To achieve optimum human health and well-being, consumers must have access to diverse foodstuffs which are well-nourishing and free from foodborne diseases (FBDs).

**Food safety** is defined as “the assurance that the food will not cause harm (chronic or acute) to the consumer when it is prepared and/or eaten according to its intended use.”<sup>5</sup> The causes of unsafe food include chemical residues and contaminants (e.g. pesticides, antibiotic drug residues, heavy metals and mycotoxins), microbial contaminants (e.g. foodborne bacteria, viruses, moulds and parasites), and mechanical/physical hazards that are widespread in the food supply chain at different stages, raising the risk of FBDs. Other emerging hazards resulting from a new source, increased exposure to an existing source, or from the human-animal-plant health-environment interface have begun to receive attention from policymakers.

Food safety hazards are increasingly recognized as a major global public health problem. Unsafe food increases intoxication and infection, creating a sporadic cycle of disease, malnutrition disability and affects vulnerable groups in society, particularly infants, young children, the elderly and immune-compromised people.

Consumers living in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) experience the majority of FBDs, including about 75 percent of deaths from foodborne illnesses (despite comprising only 41 percent of the global population). The annual estimated productivity loss and medical

<sup>5</sup> FAO. 2023. FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2031–2022. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4040en>

treatment costs due to the consumption of unsafe food in these countries have reached USD 110 billion, causing a significant economic burden. Moreover, failure to meet food safety and quality legislation exacerbates food trade for food-producing enterprises, causing trade barriers.

## The status of food safety across the region

The NENA region's rapid population growth has led to an increased demand for food, making food safety a vital factor in the agrifood transformation. Despite the region's food safety management systems, consumers face a high risk of exposure to contaminated food and foodborne diseases due to factors such as the tropical climate, which fosters the proliferation of pests and naturally occurring toxins, and the use of unsafe water supplies for irrigation and food washing. Additionally, weak infrastructure, including storage, roads and cold chains, contributes to the rise in food spoilage, which is expected to worsen with climate change.

There is a lack of coordination among sectors working on food safety, and limited capacity to fulfil mandates for risk assessment and science-based approaches. The shortage of quality data in the region poses a significant impediment to the adoption of risk-based preventive systems and effective risk management. Generating, compiling, analysing and sharing local data is essential for the proper functioning of risk analysis principles.

Several NENA countries rely on agrifood exports and have pursued value-added strategies to expand their foreign markets for raw and processed foodstuffs. However, domestic food safety concerns should not be overlooked.

Establishing effective and efficient food safety management systems in NENA countries requires a strong science- and evidence-based approach. The key foundation of a well-functioning food safety system includes (i) updated food safety legislation and standards, (ii) food safety institution (such as an agency or an effective coordination mechanism for all responsible entities), (iii) an effective enforcement capability, (iv) robust national monitoring and surveillance programmes, (v) a reliable data generation mechanism for risk analysis, and (vi) a functional and reliable conformity assessment services including laboratories systems.

## FAO studies to address food safety in the NENA region

FAO RNE works closely with governmental authorities and other relevant stakeholders in NENA countries to address barriers to accessing domestic and international markets, including food safety and quality issues.

A new study by FAO RNE on *"Mapping of food safety and quality in the NENA region: Drivers, challenges and imperatives"* is set to be launched. The study has identified several factors that contribute to food safety challenges in the region, such as (i) inadequate knowledge of good agricultural and husbandry practices among producers, (ii) excessive use of chemicals and drugs during food and animal production, (iii) insufficient food safety control mechanisms, and (iv) a lack of awareness among value chain actors.



The analysis also revealed a complex web of drivers that influences the region's food safety landscape. Although NENA countries have diverse economic and political conditions, water scarcity has emerged as a shared challenge due to rapid population growth and climate change. This, combined with global trade dynamics, exacerbates the spread of pathogens and diseases. Moreover, as the demand for food and water continues to increase, the limited availability of water resources puts considerable strain on agricultural production and supply.

These challenges can lead farmers to adopt risky agricultural practices, considering the prevalent poor water governance and institutional fragmentation in most countries. In almost all countries, governance across various sectors has been marked by weaknesses and inefficiencies, resulting in severe ecological consequences, such as contamination of water, soil and air, which disrupt different aspects of food systems and lead to critical health and economic impacts. This, in turn, results in pesticide overuse and residue, antibiotic residue, mycotoxin contamination and food adulteration.

Moreover, FAO RNE is currently developing a conceptual framework that addresses *“Improved food safety and quality in the context of One Health Approach across the NENA region”*. This report will evaluate the various components of the national food control system, including the requirements of authorities that create or issue technical regulations, developing standards, accreditation, certification, inspection, testing, risk assessment and metrology, as well as their involvement and responsibilities in food control and enforcement activities.

## Key strategies and prioritized actions

Given the multidimensional and diverse nature of food safety in the NENA region, where the control capacity is dispersed across various stakeholders at different levels, FAO RNE will collaborate with countries in the region to define five interconnected priority areas with a well-defined framework of crucial strategic actions as follows:

1. Strengthening a consistent, science-, evidence- and risk-based approach for food policies, regulations and institutional capacity modernization to bolster food governance in areas such as compliance, verification and enforcement.
2. Maintaining the agrifood system and its integrated production-to-consumption approach, with reinforced control over primary food production.
3. Promoting food safety and control management through risk-based conformity assessment procedures and food safety monitoring and surveillance programmes.
4. Improving the utilization and application of food chain information, education and communication.
5. Recognizing the significance of an integrated data management system for preparedness and response to food safety outbreaks and emergencies within the context of a risk analysis paradigm.

## Some recent FAO actions on supporting food safety in the region

### Egypt

**2021–2023: The FAO and EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) project to support the Egyptian agribusiness sector** aimed to strengthen conformity with food safety requirements in horticulture value chains in Egypt under the EBRD–European Union Value Chains Competitiveness Programme to enhance the competitiveness of SMEs (small and medium enterprises) and to facilitate access to markets and mitigate the rejection of products in export markets.

**October 2023: The inaugural meeting of the African Food Regulatory Authorities Forum (AFRAF)** was held in Egypt in October 2023 to serve as an information exchange, experience sharing and collaboration development forum between food competent authorities of countries of the African Union, to shape an agenda of collaborative initiatives to contribute to the development of a path forward for African food regulatory harmonization and integration as part of the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and to contribute to the delivery of commitments of the Food Safety Strategy for Africa (FSSA) 2022–2036. The inaugural meeting was organized in partnership with USDA, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Chamber of Food Industries, Food Export Council (FEC), Agricultural Export Council (AEC), Venture 37, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Feed the Future, FAO, World Health Organization (WHO), WFP, Université Laval, Food Risk Analysis and Regulatory Excellence Platform (PARERA), Global Food Regulatory Science Society (GFoRSS), and International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFoST).

**2024:** Egypt celebrated a **milestone of 50 years of participating in Codex work** marked by a commitment to the principles and objectives of the joint FAO and WHO programme. A celebration was hosted by the Egyptian Organization for Standardization and Quality (EOS), Codex Egypt, and the Chamber of Food Industries (CFI) with the participation of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) Vice-Chair, (FAO–WHO Coordinating Committee for Near East) CCNE Chair, (FAO–WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa) CCAFRICA Coordinator and FAO RNE. This celebration not only recognized Egypt's participation in Codex's work, but also acknowledged the significant contribution that Codex's food safety and quality standards make to advancing global food safety, health protection and fair trade interests.

### Jordan

**May 2023:** The FAO RNE regional workshop titled **Enhancing food trade in the Near East and North Africa: Food safety and trade facilitation** was held in Amman, Jordan. The workshop was attended by 46 participants of various backgrounds, including government officials from the national authorities responsible for food safety, and customs and trade administrations from 13 countries; private sector stakeholders; representatives of the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD); and experts from FAO, International Trade Centre (ITC) and WTO Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF).

Key recommendations surfaced in the workshop spurred the need for harmonization and agreed-upon food quality and safety standards. Establishing a Regional Cooperation Platform for the NENA Member States was proposed, with the goal of facilitating dialogue, information sharing and coordination on matters related to food safety and quality standards, as well as strengthening inspection and certification processes, improving finance and investment in technology transfer, building the capacity of inspectors, and improving public-private partnerships for targeted investment plans.

## Lebanon

**March 2023:** The United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub held an **Arab regional meeting in preparation for the first global Food Systems Stocktaking Moment (STM)** in 2023. The preparatory meeting was held a day before the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. The meeting was organized in cooperation with ESCWA, the United Nations Development Coordination Office (DCO), FAO RNE and other United Nations agencies, as well as key regional organizations, including LAS and AOAD. Participants exchanged views and concluded on the progress made in implementing their countries' food system transformations since the Food Systems Summit in 2021. They outlined priority actions towards accelerating those transformations in support of the achievement of the 2030 Agenda highlighting food security and healthy diets for all by focusing on trade, food-related legislation, food safety and quality, and nutrition education.

## Oman

**June 2023: The 6th Oman International Conference on Food Safety and Quality** was organized by the Omani Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, represented by the Center for Food Safety and Quality, and the International Association for Food Regulatory Science with the support and contribution of the GCC Standardization Organization (GSO), the Arab Organization for Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining (AIDSMO), CAC, the Codex Alimentarius Office of the United States Department of Agriculture (US CODEX) and UNIDO. The conference shed light on five main themes of food safety and quality and their role in enhancing sustainability in the economic sector, food risk management to achieve food security, artificial intelligence and modern technologies for food safety, as well as the enablers of an advanced and effective food safety system, and contemporary challenges in the field of food safety, quality and nutrition.

## Qatar

**May 2024: The 3rd Annual Food Safety and Nutrition Summit for GCC countries** was organized by the US Foreign Agriculture Service and hosted in cooperation with the GCC Gulf Standardization Organization, Qatar's Ministry of Public Health, and Qatar's General Organization for Standards and Metrology to raise awareness of both American and international science-based food safety and nutrition regulatory practices. While one session was dedicated to Codex, other sessions also linked to Codex work including those on pesticide residues and nutrition. Participants addressed the GSO adoption of many of the Codex texts into its standards, Circular Economy – recycled plastics, Nutrition Policies and Programmes, and Codex Standard on Camel Milk.

## United Arab Emirates

**December 2023: The 17th edition of the Dubai International Food Safety Conference**, organized by Dubai Municipality under the theme 'Impact of Climate Change on Food Safety,' included participants such as the Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology, Abu Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety Authority (ADAFSA), the Gulf Standardization Organization (GSO), FAO, Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), USDA, International Association for Food Protection (IAFP), International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF), CAC, and Campden Laboratories (Campden BRI). During the event, discussions highlighted the remarkable link between climate change and food security, and the challenges that would impact global food systems and security by exploring potential solutions and exhibited best practices, laboratory tests, AI and data science technologies currently employed in this key sector across the globe.

**April 2024: The Conference on Strengthening Control Systems to Prevent Risk of Food Fraud** was organized by ADAFSA in April 2024. It showcased best practices and global advancements in combating food fraud. It also discussed the implementation of anti-food fraud procedures at the national level, exchanging information and experiences among participating authorities on detecting food fraud cases, verifying fraudulent practices, and assessing the impact of food fraud practices on food supply chains to identify necessary measures to combat these practices. The conference aimed to develop early warning systems and risk management strategies, and enhance the detection, prediction, and evaluation of food fraud cases, while raising awareness of the risks posed to consumers and the food sector due to food fraud.

## Near East meeting

**September 2023: A new report** on the safety and regulatory aspects of cell-based food in the Near East region was published in March 2024. The report was published to monitor technical discussions during a side consultation meeting organized by FAO and WHO on the occasion of the **11th Session of the FAO and WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East (CCNE)** held in September 2023. The report summarizes the discussions held at the event, including the information on relevant FAO and WHO activities such as the ongoing work by an informal technical working group (TWG) consisting of regulatory experts from the public sector; and the FAO and WHO publication *Food safety aspects of cell-based food* which documents a comprehensive list of potential hazards and their possible causal chains.

## Several countries in the region

**June 2024: FAO hosted a workshop and training session to Enhance Food Safety Assessment Practices and Tools** with the aim of strengthening food safety assessment practices and tools. In 2019, FAO and WHO developed the Food Control System Assessment Tool (FCSAT), to support member countries in evaluating their national food control systems. Over the past years, FAO has facilitated several country assessments in the region with FCSAT, evaluating the performance of national systems against internationally recognized best practices, and formulating strategies for improvement. In order to maintain the tool's relevance and

effectiveness, experienced assessors from the region were invited to the workshop to review and discuss the Tool and the overall assessment process. The goal was to identify strategies to address emerging issues from a One Health perspective that emphasizes collaboration and a multisectoral approach.

## FAO Regional Office

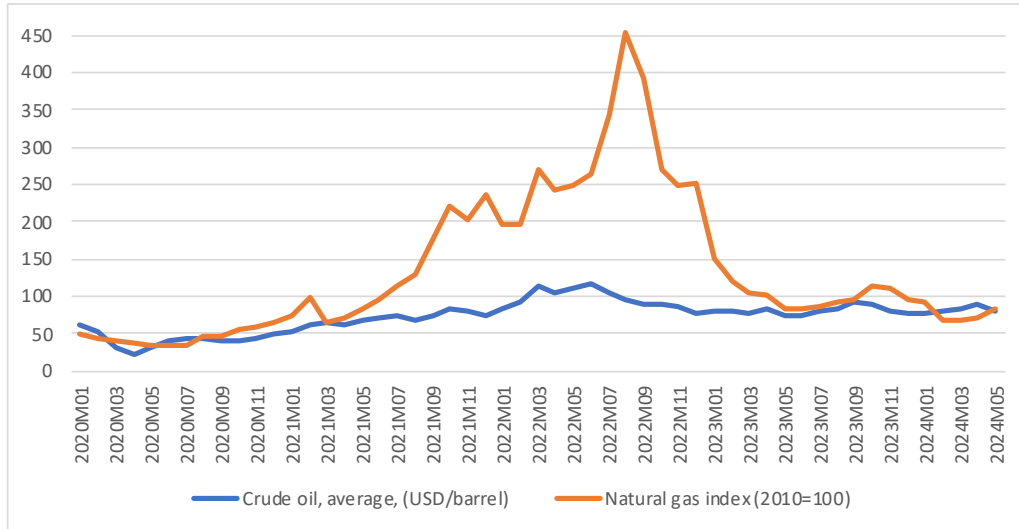
**June 2024:** FAO RNE in partnership with the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO EMRO) jointly organized an awareness campaign event on the occasion of World Food Safety Day, held under the theme “food safety: prepare for the unexpected”. For this year’s celebration, the action-oriented campaign promoted food safety awareness to strengthen efforts on preventing, detecting and managing foodborne risks globally by underlining the importance of being prepared for food safety incidents, no matter how mild or severe they can be.

The hybrid event, which was held online and at FAO RNE premises in Cairo, comprised three panel sessions with presentations and a dialogue to align priorities, support mutual efforts and address solutions to enhance ways of working together. The joint event was attended by senior officials representing food safety competent authorities, CAC (FAO and WHO Codex), FAO Food Systems and Food Safety Division (FAO ESF), International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) and WTO, in addition to partners from LAS, ADAFSA, the Egyptian National Food Safety Authority (NFSA) and the Moroccan National Office of Food Safety (ONSSA).

Controlling food risks and outbreaks cannot be achieved by one sector working alone. In this context, FAO RNE works to assist the governments of the region in monitoring food safety challenges by providing support and working to confront general challenges. It assists governments by strengthening efforts aimed at establishing effective and efficient food safety management systems, bolstering coordination mechanisms between all sectors, and communicating between key stakeholders. FAO RNE also helps countries adopt risk-based prevention systems, effective risk management and rapid response to food safety emergencies and foodborne disease outbreaks through a One Health approach.

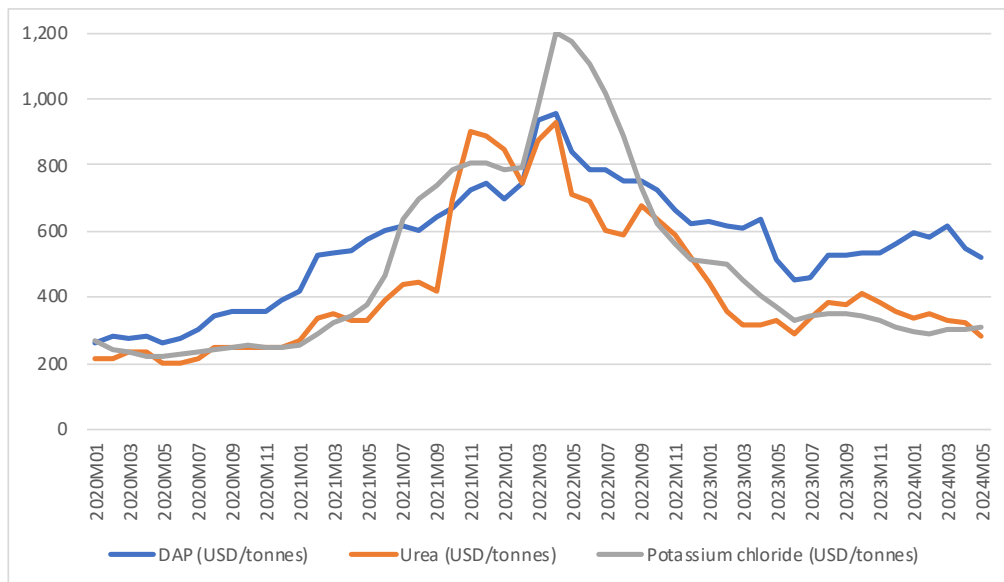
# ANNEX

**Figure A1.** Crude oil (USD/barrel) and natural gas index (2010=100) of the World Bank



Source: World Bank. 2024. Commodity Price Data (The Pink Sheet). In: *The World Bank*. Washington, DC. [Cited 10 June 2024]. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/commodity-markets>

**Figure A2.** Prices of fertilizers: Diammonium phosphate (DAP), urea and potassium chloride (USD/tonnes)



Source: World Bank. 2024. Commodity Price Data (The Pink Sheet). In: *The World Bank*. Washington, DC. [Cited 10 June 2024]. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/commodity-markets>



The Quarterly Food Policy Monitoring Bulletin presents recent trends in international commodity markets, domestic food price developments, and regional crop situations. It covers the latest food and trade policy measures adopted in countries of the NENA region. Each Bulletin has a focus topic that has strategic importance in enhancing food security and nutrition in the region.

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