

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

# GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY  
USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT  
POLICY

Voluntary  Public

**Date:** 10/29/2014

**GAIN Report Number:**

## Costa Rica

**Post:** San Jose

### Costa Rican agriculture affected by drought

**Report Categories:**

Agricultural Situation

Climate Change/Global Warming/Food Security

**Approved By:**

Erich R. Kuss, Agricultural Counselor

**Prepared By:**

Victor Gonzalez, Agricultural Specialist

**Report Highlights:**

The Costa Rican government issued an emergency decree to deal with the effects of sharply reduced rainfall during the early months of the current rainy season. Rain patterns have been closer to normal during the months of September and October, but producers are concerned about the potential for an extended dry season, which is expected to begin in November.

## **General Information:**

### **Effects of drought in Costa Rican Agriculture**

The Costa Rican government issued an emergency decree in the first week of October as a result of a drought caused by the weather phenomenon known as “El Niño.” The effects of the drought have been felt primarily in the Northern and Central Pacific regions and to a lesser extent in the Central Valley. Some regions of the country (San Carlos and the Atlantic for instance), have had excessive rainfall, which has also caused production problems.

The Emergency Decree covers a total of 19 provincial sub-divisions known as “cantones,” covering the entire province of Guanacaste, and part of Puntarenas and Alajuela provinces. The decree allows the government to allocate resources to the affected areas, although different groups have recently complained that the government has not allocated specific funds to assist with the problem so far. The emergency decree allows public and private institutions to allocate funds through the National Emergency Commission (CNE). The Vice-Minister of Agriculture recently acknowledged that the government is still looking for funding options. Once resources become available, the CNE will coordinate with local emergency committees to allocate the funds. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG) had been preparing for this event since the declaration of a yellow alert on July 22, so it has already identified affected producers, regions and sectors.

The effects of the drought were felt strongly in the regions mentioned above primarily during the first months of the rainy season, which started in May, but in particular during the months of June and July (this July was the driest in 50 years, according to the National Meteorological Institute, or NMI). For instance, according to data from the NMI, through September 22, Guanacaste had an accumulated yearly rain deficit of 53 percent.

Although the rains returned to a more normal pattern during the months of September and October, the country is expected to begin transitioning to the dry season within the next two weeks. The rains could stop in Guanacaste by the first week of November, resulting in a long dry season. The effects of lower rainfall earlier this year, will be felt primarily during the months of March to May of 2015. That is the period of most concern for livestock producers in particular.

The MAG has estimated losses of 14 billion colones (\$25.7 million) in the agriculture and livestock sectors as a result of the drought. Most of the losses were experienced in livestock, sugar cane, and rice production. In the case of livestock, the National Livestock Corporation (CORFOGA) has worked with producers over the years to educate them on the need to make better plans for the dry season, including planting improved pastures, using alternative feeding ingredients, storing animal feeds, improving the relation of animals to area, etc. As a result of these programs, CORFOGA believes that cattlemen are better prepared to deal with climatic events. Also, when cattlemen learned that the situation was going to be difficult this year, many of them sold their cattle in advance, thus avoiding the loss of animals.

The Rice Corporation (CONARROZ) is also monitoring the drought situation closely, although there are no reports of large areas at risk of loss at this time. In this sector, most of the negative effects of the drought were experienced in the Gulf of Nicoya area in Guanacaste by producers who grow rice without irrigation. Even with the current rainfall, some of these areas may suffer losses if the rains stop in early November as expected. However, the total area at risk is small (about 215 ha. at this time), but would affect mostly smaller producers. CONARROZ is still waiting for the end of the rainy season to have a better idea of what is going to happen to these plantations. CONARROZ expects that only farmers who have irrigation will plant a second rice crop in Guanacaste early next year ( this is the normal pattern in rice production in that region). Some farmers planted

a second rice crop without irrigation in the South Pacific, where the rains stop later in the year.

During a recent trip to Guanacaste, FAS officials discussed the situation with growers of sugar cane and rice. In both cases, producers indicated that farmers who do not have irrigation will obtain lower yields, but, as a result of increased rainfall in September and October, total crop losses are not expected to be widespread, even for those who do not have irrigation. The larger rice and sugar growers normally plant their crops using irrigation, so, in general no significant losses are expected to affect those producers. Sugar growers mentioned that production in that region is expected to decline this year, partly as a result of the drought, but also because 2013/2014 was a record production year and it is normal for the crop to decline after such a good year. The sugar harvest will start in December.

Post will continue to monitor the situation and report as more information becomes available.