



GIEWS Country Brief Mauritius

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FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT

- **Below-average rains in early 2021 undermine production prospects of 2021 food crops**
- **Production of food crops estimated at below-average level in 2020**
- **Food prices increased in early 2021, but remain slightly below year-earlier values**
- **COVID-19 pandemic caused large economic downturn, raising concerns regarding access to food**

Below-average rains in early 2021 undermine production prospects

About 40 percent of the country's land is used for crop cultivation, of which about 90 percent is sugarcane, a major export earner, with the remaining land planted with tea, tobacco and a small number of food crops, mainly vegetables and fruits. Although food crop production stretches throughout the year, planting of the main season crops normally takes place between November and April, and the harvest period normally falls between the months of June and September.

Seasonal rains started timely in November 2020 and rainfall amounts were overall adequate to support planting operations of 2021 food crops. However, below-average precipitation amounts in January and February 2021 reduced soil moisture levels and consequently impaired production prospects.

Production of food crops unchanged at below-average level in 2020

According to Statistics Mauritius, production of food crops is estimated at 95 000 tonnes in 2020, about 7 percent below the previous five-year average and nearly unchanged compared to the output in 2019. In spite of a modest increase in plantings, mostly of vegetables, the below-average production reflects unfavourable weather conditions during the first semester of 2020 that adversely affected yields. In addition, COVID-19-related lockdown measures had a negative impact over agricultural activities.

Production of sugarcane in 2020 is estimated at 2.6 million tonnes, about 23 percent lower on a yearly basis and nearly 30 percent below the previous five-year average, mostly reflecting a significant fall in yields, following unfavourable weather conditions. A small contraction in the planted area, which

has steadily decreased since 2016, also contributed to the production decline in 2020.

Prices of food increased in early 2021, but remain lower on yearly basis

Following a significant increase of the monthly food inflation rate between January and April 2020, driven by a depreciation of the national currency and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, prices of food remained stable or declined from May to December 2020. Since January 2021, food inflation has accelerated moderately, mainly driven by price increases of fruits and vegetables, but price levels were still about 4 percent lower on a yearly basis as of April.

COVID-19 pandemic raises concerns regarding access to food

The national economy, highly dependent on tourism and service sectors, is estimated to have contracted by about 10 percent in 2020, driven by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In early 2021, an uptick in COVID-19 cases led to the re-introduction of some containment measures in March, likely slowing down the economic recovery. Low income households are likely to continue to experience income constraints, raising concerns regarding access to food.

To help stabilize the households' incomes and promote an acceleration of economic activities, the government continues to disburse monthly payments to employees of private companies and self-employed workers through two employment assistance programmes, the "Wage Assistance Scheme" and the "Self Employed Assistance Scheme".

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