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Mexico Projects Adequate Foodstuffs Output Despite Bad Weather

by LADB Staff

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The Secretaria de Agricultura, Ganaderia y Desarrollo Rural (SAGAR) has projected production of basic grains and foodstuffs above 30 million metric tons for both the 1997 and 1998 seasons, despite adverse weather. SAGAR estimates production of corn, wheat, sorghum, and beans at 31 million MT for 1997. In a preliminary and unofficial estimate for 1998, the department forecast production at 33 million MT.

Addressing the Comision de Agricultura y Ganaderia in the Chamber of Deputies, Arroyo Marroquin said production for the current season and the next will surpass the average basic grain crops of 1990-1995. Production limited by bad weather Arroyo said excessive rain in western and central Mexico in the fall-winter season and freezing temperatures in central and northern areas reduced grain and bean production in 1997. But increased production in areas not as affected by adverse weather helped bring total output to 31 million MT.

The agriculture secretary attributed the overly wet conditions to El Nino, which affected production on about 2 million hectares of land. The excessive moisture probably reduced 1997 production by about 3.5%, said Arroyo.

Freezing temperatures caused the greatest damage to bean crops in the western and central states of Sinaloa, Jalisco, Nayarit, and Zacatecas. The damage will probably reduce this year's bean crop by as much as 40%, said Abraham Montes Alvarado, president of the Union Nacional de Productores de Frijol. The reduced output will force Mexico to import beans to cover demand during May-August, when supplies will be lowest. Given the expected reduction, the state-run foodstuffs agency CONASUPO will import about 1 million MT of beans this year.

Arroyo Marroquin said impact from El Nino could spill into 1998, since excessive moisture may prevent farmers from timely planting. As a result, SAGAR had developed an alternative planting timetable. Because of the unknown impact of El Nino, some agricultural specialists doubt the accuracy of SAGAR's 33- million MT production forecast for 1998. El Economista says output could drop below the 31 million MT produced in 1997. "Projections from agricultural specialists suggest production could decline by 1.8% to 2% from 1997 levels," said the newspaper in early February.

Even if 1998 production reaches 33 million MT as SAGAR predicts, the government is prepared to import large amounts of grain to meet growing domestic demand, particularly in the livestock and poultry industries. Federico Ovalle Vaquera, president of the Central Independiente de Obreros Agricolas y Campesinos (CIOAC), estimates that imports of grain, oilseeds and basic foodstuffs could reach 8.4 million MT in 1997-1998. Still, Vaquera said, the import levels forecast for this year are slightly lower than the 8.5 million MT imported in 1996- 1997. Corn and grain imports alone

amounted to about 3.1 million MT that year. (Sources: Reuter, 02/11/98; El Economista, 02/04/98, 02/17/98, 02/18/98; Notimex, 01/23/98, 02/06/98, 02/13/98, 02/19/98; Excelsior, 02/02/98, 02/24/98)

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