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Dalia El-Agami



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 Eipss.EG  Eis\_EG

TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64  
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: [info@eis-eg.org](mailto:info@eis-eg.org)

## Egypt: Dimensions of the gap in major food crops

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At a time when achievement of food security is considered one of the most important strategic issues across the world, Egypt unfortunately still suffers from a large gap in major food crops such as wheat, rice and corn; as with the steadily increasing population, the state has been unable to provide the basic food essentials for citizens, as it has failed to achieve self-sufficiency in these important commodities. Instead, it tended to reduce the gap between demand and supply of these commodities by importing from abroad, which led to overburdening the state's general budget and increasing the trade balance deficit.

With the aggravation of the crisis as a result of the wrong economic policies pursued by successive Egyptian governments, the citizen is solely held responsible for the consequences of these policies, amid claims that the overpopulation is the main reason for this food gap. To reduce the burden on the state's general budget, several decrees were issued to reduce the subsidy item, as preparatory steps for lifting subsidies permanently, in implementation of the terms imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to provide loans to the government.

In fact, the issue of food security is one of the most dangerous weapons used by the great powers in confronting developing countries, as it is used as a pretext to pressure countries to comply with their conditions and implement their policies, which leads to most countries falling under economic dependency on exporting countries.

The agricultural sector is considered one of the most important sectors of national economy for any country trying to achieve self-sufficiency and reduce its food gap.

Despite the fact that Egypt is primarily an agricultural country, it unfortunately suffers from a major gap in many food crops. According to data from the [Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics](#) (CAPMS), the agricultural sector contributed 11.4% of Egypt's GDP at cost of production based on economic activities at 2018/2019 prices, which is considered a small percentage in an agricultural country like Egypt.

The food gap in Egypt is further widening, including wheat, corn, rice, beans, and tomatoes, where Egypt imports about 80% of its food needs from abroad (5). Thus, it will be difficult for Egypt to achieve [self-sufficiency](#) in food crops, especially in light of the high cost of agriculture and the increase in losses resulting from the use of old traditional agricultural machines such as: sickles, axes and agricultural tractors, while other countries use robots and information technology.

The extent of the widening food gap in Egypt, with respect to some commodities, can be illustrated by comparing data obtained in 2012 with data obtained in 2018, as no recent official data beyond 2018 is available.

### Data of the food gap in Egypt, related to some essential commodities, in 2012:

(Quantity: 1,000 tons)

Commodity	Domestic production	Imports	Available for consumption	Food gap / Surplus	Self-sufficiency (%)
Maize	6877	3284	10155	(3278)	67.7
Rice	5675	24	5549	126	102.3
Dry beans	141	237	363	(222)	38.8
Lentils	01	76	64	(63)	1.6
Flaxseed	05	6	10	(5)	50
Sunflower	19	78	95	(76)	20
Sesame	44	32	71	(27)	62
Red meat	990	208	1155	(165)	85.7

**Source:** CAPMAS, *Bulletin of Production and Foreign Trade of Agricultural Commodities / 2012.*

Gap= domestic production - available for consumption.

Self-sufficiency= domestic production ÷ available for consumption.

### Data of the food gap in Egypt for the same commodities in 2018:

(Quantity: 1,000 tons)

Commodity	Domestic production	Imports	Available for consumption	Food gap / Surplus	Self-sufficiency (%)
Maize	8349	8388	16734	(8385)	49.9
Rice	4961	510	5467	(506)	90.7
Dry beans	116	850	933	(817)	12.4
Lentils	02	200	181	(179)	1.1
Flaxseed	07	13	19	(12)	36.8



Sunflower	20	91	108	(88)	18.5
Sesame	36	19	40	(4)	90
Red meat	858	913	1760	(902)	48.8

**Source:** CAPMAS, *Bulletin of Production and Foreign Trade of Agricultural Commodities / 2018.*

## Food Gap in 2012

1- Maize: About 6.9 million tons were produced, and about 3.3 million tons were imported, while the available quantity for consumption was about 10.2 million tons, with a food gap of 3.3 million tons, a self-sufficiency rate of 67.7%.

2- Rice: About 5.7 million tons were produced, 24 thousand tons were imported, and 5.6 million tons were available for consumption. This year, rice achieved a surplus of 126 thousand tons, a sufficiency rate of 102.3%.

3- Dry beans: About 141 thousand tons were produced, 237 thousand tons were imported, and 363,000 tons were available for consumption. Thus, there was a food gap in beans by 222 thousand tons, a sufficiency rate of 38.8%.

4- Lentils: About a thousand tons were produced, 76 thousand tons were imported, and 64 thousand tons were available for consumption, a food gap of 63 thousand tons, a sufficiency rate of 1.6%.

5- Flaxseed: Five thousand tons were produced, 6 thousand tons were imported, 10 thousand tons were available for consumption, a food gap of 5 thousand tons, with a self-sufficiency rate of 50%.

6- Sunflower: 19 thousand tons were produced, 78 thousand tons were imported, and 95 thousand tons were available for consumption, a food gap of 76 thousand tons, a self-sufficiency rate of 20%.

7- Sesame: Some 44 thousand tons were produced, 32 thousand tons were imported, and 71 thousand tons were available for consumption, a food gap of 27 thousand tons, with a self-sufficiency rate of 62%.

8- Red meat: About 990 thousand tons were produced, 208 thousand tons were imported, and the available quantity for consumption was about 1.2 million tons, a food gap of 165 thousand tons, with a self-sufficiency rate of 85.7%.

## Food Gap in 2018:

1- Maize: Some 8.3 million tons were produced, about 8.4 million tons were imported, and 16.7 million tons were available for consumption. The food gap was estimated at about 8.4 million tons, a self-sufficiency rate of 49.9%.

2- Rice: About 5 million tons were produced, about 510 thousand tons were imported, while the quantity available for consumption was about 5.5 million tons, a food gap estimated at about 506 thousand tons, with a sufficiency rate of 90.7%.

3- Dry beans: Some 116 thousand tons were produced, about 850 thousand tons were imported, 933 thousand tons were available for consumption, a food gap of 817 thousand tons, a sufficiency rate of 12.4%.

4- Lentils: Two thousand tons were produced, about 200 thousand tons were imported, and about 181 thousand tons were available for consumption, a food gap of about 179 thousand tons, with a self-sufficiency rate of 1.1%.

5- Flaxseed: Some 7,000 tons were produced, 13,000 tons were imported, and 19,000 tons were available for consumption, a food gap of 12 thousand tons, with a self-sufficiency rate of 36.8%.

6- Sunflower: About 20 thousand tons were produced, 91 thousand tons were imported, and about 108 thousand tons were available for consumption, a food gap estimated at 88 thousand tons, with a sufficiency rate of 18.5%.

7- Sesame: Some 36 thousand tons were produced, 19 thousand tons were imported, 40 thousand tons were available for consumption, a food gap estimated at 4 thousand tons, with a sufficiency rate of 90%.

8- Red meat: About 858 thousand tons were produced, 913 thousand tons were imported, some 1.8 million tons were available for consumption, a food gap estimated at 902 thousand tons, with a sufficiency rate of 48.8%.

Comparing the 2012 data with the 2018 data on the gap in food crops, we find that:

-The food gap in maize widened from 3.3 million tons in 2012, a self-sufficiency rate of 67.7% to 8.4 million tons in 2018, a self-sufficiency rate of 49.4%.

-Rice achieved a food surplus in 2012 by 126 thousand tons, with a self-sufficiency rate of more than 102%, against a food gap of 506 thousand tons of rice in 2018, a self-sufficiency rate down to 90.7%.

-The food gap in dry beans increased from 222 thousand tons in 2012 to 817 thousand tons in 2018, and the self-sufficiency rate declined from 38% to 12.4%.

-The food gap in lentils increased from 63 thousand tons in 2012 to 179 thousand tons in 2018, and the self-sufficiency rate declined from 1.6 percent in 2012 to 1.1 percent in 2018.

-The food gap in flaxseed widened from 5,000 tons in 2012 to 12,000 tons in 2018, with a decline in the self-sufficiency rate from 50% to 36.8%.

-The food gap in sunflowers also increased from 76 thousand tons in 2012 to 88 thousand tons in 2018, and the self-sufficiency rate declined from 20% to 18.5%.

-The food gap in sesame dropped from 27 thousand tons to 4 thousand tons, with an increase in the self-sufficiency rate from 62% in 2012 to 90% in 2018.

-The food gap in ed meat increased from 165 thousand tons in 2012 to 902 thousand tons in 2018, with a drop in the self-sufficiency rate from 85.7% to 48.8%.

Thus, it is clear that the food gap in these important commodities widened by a remarkable percentage, except for rice and sesame, which indicates existence of a major problem in the possibility of Egypt's achievement of food security.

Egypt's food gap crisis has exacerbated as a result of the wrong economic policies pursued by successive Egyptian governments, which was evident after comparing the estimates of the gap in food crops between 2012, when there was a real will to adopt different policies in order to reduce the gap, and 2018, when multiple governments, since the 2013 coup, followed the same wrong policies.

Instead of holding these governments accountable, the citizen is held solely responsible for the consequences of their wrong policies, under the pretext that overpopulation was the main reason for this food gap. Furthermore, these governments have adopted a policy of reducing subsidies on basic commodities, under the guise of reducing the burden on the state's public budget.

However, the truth is that these decisions are just preliminary steps to permanently lifting subsidies on these commodities, in implementation of the conditions imposed by the IMF in order to provide loans to the government. The subsidy for bread, which is the main component of food for the average Egyptians, was reduced via reducing its weight and raising its price.

In the end, solutions to the food gap and achievement of self-sufficiency in basic food crops, primarily wheat, only need a political will from the ruling regime, with keenness on economic independence, away from dependency, in addition to increasing oversight of state agencies to curb the rampant corruption among its pillars, which devours the country's riches, with redistribution of wealth among the people.