
IRAQ OUTLINES 2020 WHEAT IMPORT GOAL, SAYS PROTESTS NOT DISRUPTING CARGOES

- 06.12.2019

Asharq Al-Awsat (5 December 2019)

Iraq, a major Middle East grain importer, said on Wednesday it planned to purchase 750,000 tons of wheat from abroad in 2020 and said nationwide protests that have extended to a key port were not disrupting shipments so far.

Iraq needs between 4.5 million and 5 million tons of wheat a year to supply its food rationing program. It mixes local wheat with grain from Australia, Canada and the United States.

This is within our planning budget, Hassanein al-Zubaidi, the new head of the Iraq Grain Board, told Reuters, referring to the target of importing 750,000 tons of wheat next year.

Zubaidi, who took up the post as head of the state grain buyer in October, said Iraq had 1.2 million tonnes of strategic wheat reserves, enough to last three months.

Zubaidi replaced Naeem al-Maksousi a week after the eruption of protests against the government and demanding an end to corruption. Protests, in which over 400 demonstrators have been killed, have spread to the Gulf port of Umm Qasr.

But Zubaidi said on Wednesday shipments were offloading normally. We dont currently have problems in discharging rice and wheat from vessels in Iraqi ports, he said. Umm Qasr receives imports of grain, vegetable oils and sugar shipments to a nation largely dependent on imported food.

Zubaidi said Iraq, which had a two-month strategic reserve of rice, signed a contract to import 120,000 tons of Vietnamese rice last week.

The countrys rice purchases from local farmers were expected to reach 667,000 tons this season, he said.

The grain board, which falls under the Trade Ministry, holds regular international tenders to import wheat and rice for the rationing program that covers flour, cooking oil, rice, sugar and baby milk formula.

The program was first created in 1991 to combat UN economic sanctions.

<https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/2022106/iraq-outlines-2020-wheat-import-goal-says-protests-not-disrupting-cargoes>

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