

## Ivory Coast Cocoa Farmers See Rainfall Boosting Mid-Crop Harvest

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(Bloomberg) -- Good rainfall in Ivory Coast's cocoa-growing areas has farmers upbeat on prospects for the season's smaller crop that starts in April.

Soil is moist in producing regions including the fertile southwest, and the development of flowers that turn into pods is getting a boost from the wet weather, growers said this week.

Farmers in Ivory Coast, the world's top cocoa producer, harvest a main crop from October to March and a smaller one, called the mid-crop, from April to September.

Recent rain "gives hope for the mid-crop," Jacques Oulaye, a cocoa farmer based in Gbapleu, in the country's western mountain region, said by phone March 6. "Young flowers in the trees have begun to blossom, meaning the new pods will go out soon."

A large mid-crop would compound a surplus of cocoa piling up in Ivory Coast, after the main crop was bigger than expected and some local companies defaulted on contracts to export cocoa.

The International Cocoa Organization last week forecast the West African country's harvest will increase 20 percent in the current season, contributing to a global surplus that's projected to be the biggest in six years.

### Abundant Rain

The village of Yabayo, near Soubre, in Ivory Coast's south-west received "abundant" rain last week, said Jacob Konan, a farmer.

"All is green in the farms, from the trees to the pods,"

Konan, who owns a 9-hectare farm, said by phone March 6. "The trees are developing well, the soil is really wet, which is ideal for harvesting."

Blossom development also benefited because dry winds that blow south from the Sahara desert from December to February have been weak this season, said Badou Koffi, who owns a plantation of 15 hectares in the eastern town of Abengourou.

"We've had three rains in the past two weeks. The soil has become wet again, we don't have dust any more," Koffi said by phone March 6. "This year, the trees haven't turned dry and yellow during the dry season, they've remained green."

The southwestern city of San Pedro is expected to receive 2.3 centimeters of rain in the week ending March 19, compared with the 10-year average of 0.8 centimeters, according to weather station data compiled by Bloomberg. The forecast in the same week for Daloa in the west is 1.8 centimeters, and Bondoukou in the northeast is expected to receive 0.4 centimeters.

Read about Ivory Coast's efforts to curb speculation in the cocoa market

Ivory Coast sells most of its cocoa production before the harvest starts and sets the minimum price given to farmers based on international prices. London futures have dropped more than 30 percent in the past five months and reached a three-year low in February.

As a result, the Ivory Coast industry regulator, Le Conseil du Cafe Cacao, will probably have to cut the price offered to farmers for the mid-crop, Managing Director Massandje Toure- Litse said last month.

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