

World food prices now reach ever higher levels

World food prices rose to a record high in January, according to the UN FAO

The FAO (Food and Agricultural Organisation) Food Price Index, which measures the wholesale price of basic foods within a basket, averaged 231 points last month, up by 3.4 percent from December. It is the seventh monthly rise for the index.

"These high prices are likely to persist in the months to come," FAO economist Abdolreza Abbassian said. The individual group components of the index, apart from meat, all registered rises in January. The Cereal Price Index averaged 245 points in January, reflecting rises in the price of wheat and grain. This was driven higher by flooding in Australia, which is a major wheat exporter. Rice prices fell slightly as the data coincided with harvests in many countries.

The Meat Price Index held steady at 166 points despite falling prices in Europe where a large amount of animal feed was found to have been contaminated with dioxin. This was offset by a small increase in meat prices in Brazil and the United States. Sugar prices also remained high due to tight supplies.

The high price of food is thought to have been a factor in recent political unrest in both Algeria and Tunisia in the form of anti-government demonstrations, protests which have spread



REUTERS

A customer buys fish at a local market in Vallehermoso in Madrid

to neighbouring Egypt and Jordan.

Recently, white sugar futures hit a record high over concern that the damage Cyclone Yasi could cause to

the Australian cane crop. World Bank President Robert Zoellick has asked global leaders to 'put food first' and tackle the problem of price volatility.

"We are going to be facing a broader trend of increasing commodity prices, including food commodity prices," he said.

Santander profits hit by bad loans in Spain

Spanish bank group Santander saw full-year profits fall 8.5 percent in 2010 because of bad debts in its home market

Net profits of 8.2bn Euros were hit by a 472m Euro provision for bad loans, in the wake of a collapsed property market and a severe recession with 20 percent unemployment. The group's profits would have been worse, were it not for a strong showing at its UK and Brazil units. The group's British arm reported £2.3bn profits, up 11 percent on 2009.

It is believed that the Madrid-based bank intends to sell off a 20 percent stake in its UK business in the next six months via a flotation on the London Stock Exchange, expected to raise more than £3bn.

The firm also saw strong business in Latin America, with full-year profits up 31 percent in Brazil, 38 percent in Mexico and 21 percent in Chile. This was in sharp contrast with Santander's core continental Europe business, where profits dived 23 percent. In the UK — where property prices have fallen much less compared with Spain — the proportion remained steady at less than 1.8 percent.



Sophie Bowness poses with a maquette of Hepworth's sculpture

Dame Hepworth sculptures donated to new gallery

A £35m art gallery celebrating sculptor Dame Barbara Hepworth to open in Yorkshire on May 21st

The Hepworth Wakefield will be the largest purpose-built art gallery to open in the UK since the launch of Tate St Ives in Cornwall in 1993. It will feature 44 rarely-seen working models donated by Dame Barbara's family plus works by Henry Moore and Turner. Its 10 galleries will also host visiting exhibitions by artists including Eva Rothschild.

Dame Barbara was born and grew up in the West Yorkshire city. She went to the Leeds School of Art with Moore. The pair, who remained lifelong friends, were pioneers of abstract sculpture in the UK.

The artist became known for her pierced shapes, and her most famous works include *Single Form*, which is in the United Nations Plaza in New York, and *Winged Figure*, on the side

of the John Lewis department store in London. She was made a Dame in 1965 and died in a fire at her studio in St. Ives 10 years later at the age of 72. The gallery has been designed by architect David Chipperfield, and is expected to attract 150,000 visitors per year.

The gallery's Director, Simon Wallis, said, "The Hepworth Wakefield is a world class building designed by one of this country's leading architects, and is a fitting home for Wakefield's long-held ambition to be recognised as the birthplace of Barbara Hepworth. As well as Hepworth's 44 plaster and aluminium prototypes, the gallery will also include tools and materials from her studio, also donated by her descendants. The gift is a unique group of Barbara Hepworth's surviving prototypes, the majority in plaster, from which editions of bronzes were cast. It will greatly enhance our understanding of her working methods."

Google eyes Apple in tablet war

Google unveils operating system for tablet computers aimed at ramping up the competition with Apple's iPad

More than 15m iPads have been sold since Apple launched the gadget in 2010. The latest version of Google's Android OS is called Honeycomb and it has been specifically optimised for tablets. The features include the ability to buy applications from a computer, buy

features inside the app, video chat and improved graphics. "This is a serious investment of years of design and engineering to really nail the experience for a larger screen," Hugo Barra, Google's Director of Products for Mobile, says. "This is not a large phone — we wanted tablets running Honeycomb to not just be bigger but also to be better." Motorola will be the first to bring a product running Honeycomb to

market. Its Xoom device is due to go on sale soon.

Google's announcement of a Web-based version of the Android market is one that is seen as long overdue. This now means that users can browse and buy apps directly from the Web. Previously, they had to purchase through the Android market directly from the device making it difficult to find, download and buy apps.

EU plans bigger exchange of air passenger information

In future, all airlines flying to and from destinations in the EU will have to transfer passenger data to national authorities on request

The USA, Canada and Australia already get such data from the EU. The European Commission proposals will be studied by the European Parliament and EU governments before becoming law. The Commission stresses that stringent safeguards will be in place to protect privacy, in line with European human rights standards.

The proposals are likely to be amended — perhaps substantially — as lengthy negotiations will take place before they become law. Last year,



REUTERS

Tourists, transiting in Germany, arrive with the charter flight

Euro MPs got extra privacy safeguards incorporated into a deal allowing USA anti-terror investigators to check data on European bank transactions.

In the new airline data package the Commission proposes that:

- Passenger Name Record (PNR) data for international flights will be transferred from the carriers' reservation systems to a dedicated unit in the EU country of arrival or departure;
- The data transfers will only take place on request — the national authorities will not have direct access to

the airlines' databases;

- The system will apply to international flights to and from countries outside the EU — not flights within the EU or domestic flights;

- PNR data will be kept for 30 days after a flight, in the dedicated unit, after which the passenger's name must be deleted, but the anonymous data can be stored for up to five years; and

- No sensitive personal data, such as religious or political opinions or ethnic origin, can be transferred by airlines.