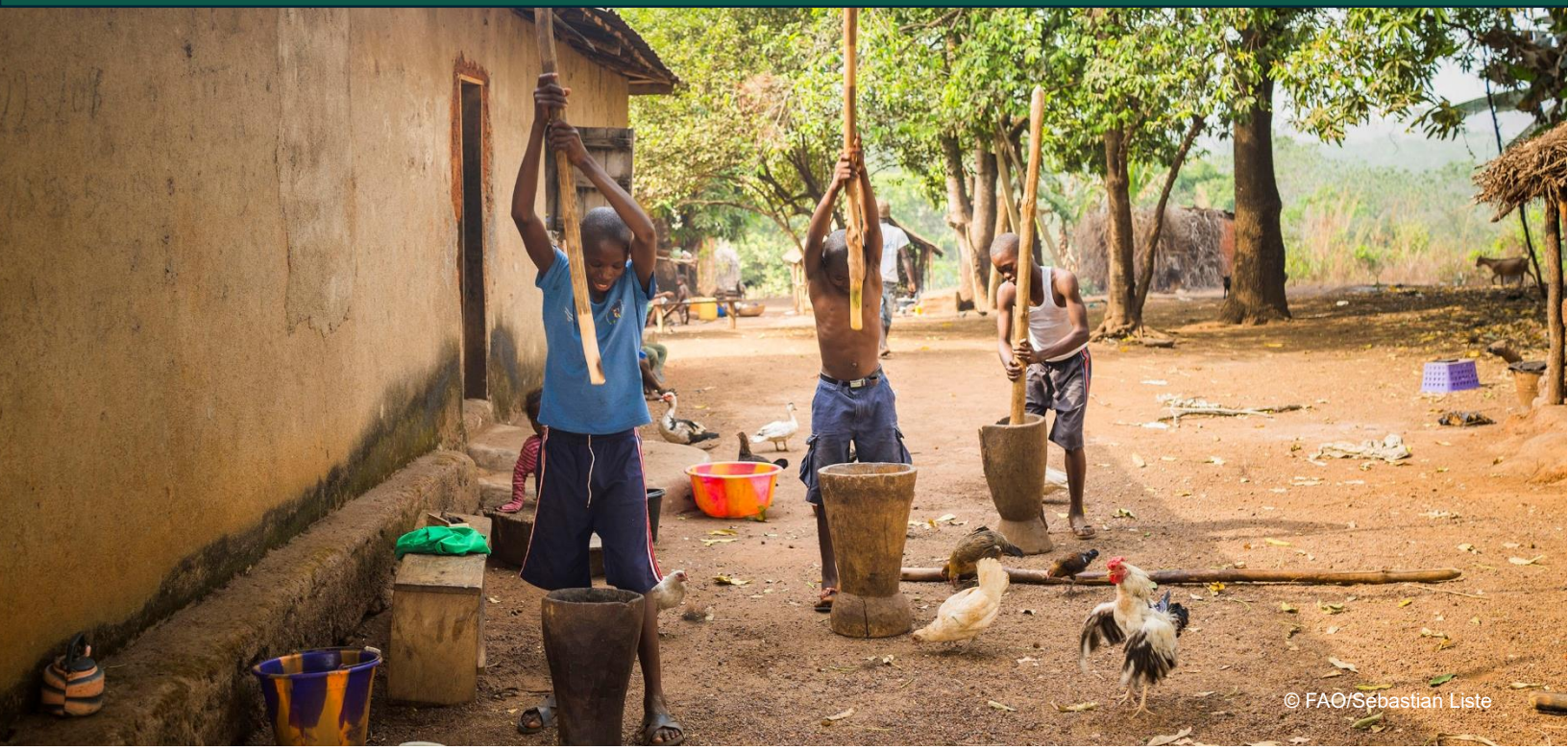
50x2030 DATA-SMART AGRICULTURE

SURVEY BRIEF

Focus: Production, methods and environment

Agricultural year 2023/24

SIERRA LEONE



Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

THE WORLD BANK

Under the umbrella of the 50x2030 Initiative to Close the Agricultural Data Gap, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) collaborates with Statistics Sierra Leone on the implementation of the Sierra Leone Annual Agriculture Surveys (SLAAS). Through the Initiative, the country will strengthen its national statistics system, improve the use of survey data in policymaking and enhance the capacity of key data users to optimize evidence-based decisions.

The 2024 Annual Agricultural Survey in Sierra Leone included two main modules: the Core Module and the Production Methods and Environment (PME). The PME Module collected data on a broad range of topics related to agricultural practices and their intersection with the environment in which the agricultural sector operates.

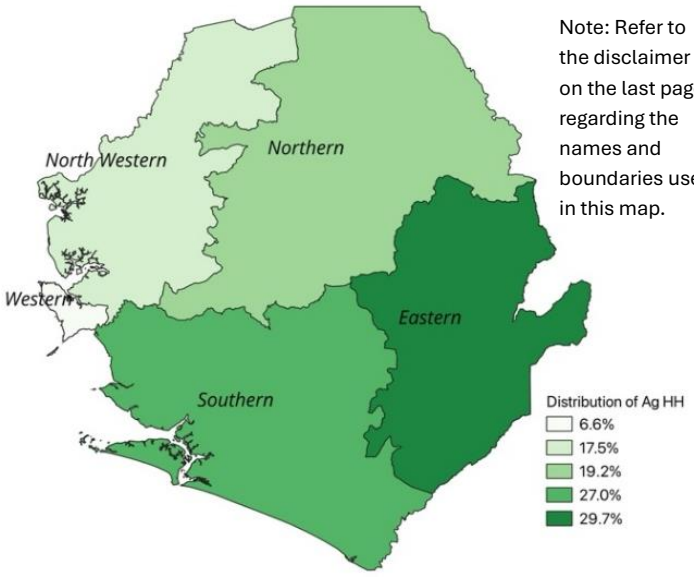
Key features

This note provides key insights on agricultural holdings in the household sector in Sierra Leone during the agricultural season 2023/24. It presents indicators on environment and production methods. More detailed indicators are available in the SLAAS 2024 survey report (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2025). A technical annex at the end of this document provides further details on the indicators presented, definitions, sources and assumptions used.

Key characteristics of agricultural holdings

Agriculture remains the cornerstone of Sierra Leone's economy, driven by approximately 1.3 million households, with the highest concentration of farmers in the Eastern and Southern regions. The sector is dominated by smallholders (97.4 percent of agricultural households).

Rice and cassava serve as the national mainstays, accounting for 48 percent of all cultivated land. Livestock also plays a vital role for 61.2 percent of households, with poultry being the most prevalent (2.6 million chickens), followed by goats (around 1 million) and sheep (nearly 0.5 million).



Note: Refer to the disclaimer on the last page regarding the names and boundaries used in this map.

Author's own elaboration, 2025. Based on Statistics Sierra Leone. 2025. Sierra Leone Annual Agricultural Survey Report 2024. Freetown, Sierra Leone. https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/2024-SLAAS-Report_V4.pdf

1.3 million agricultural households

Average agricultural area per holding **1.7 ha**

Average planted area **1.2 ha**

Chickens	2.6 million
Goats	1 million
Sheep	0.5 million

The sector is hindered by high vulnerability and limited modernization. Productivity is severely constrained by a near-total reliance on rainfall and the persistence of traditional slash-and-burn practices. Farmers are exposed to frequent shocks – most notably crop pests, floods, and droughts – which are compounded by low input adoption. Consequently, yields for the major staple crops remain modest, with rice and maize averaging 2.0 t/ha and 1.8 t/ha, respectively.

Land, soil and inputs: practices that limit productivity

Farming in Sierra Leone occurs primarily on flat (74 percent) and loamy (70 percent) terrain. While this topography is favorable for agricultural activity, the lack of erosion control structures on 97 percent of parcels leaves the land vulnerable during heavy rains.

97%

of **parcels lack erosion control** structures

74%

of **parcels are mainly flat,** and 17% have gentle slopes

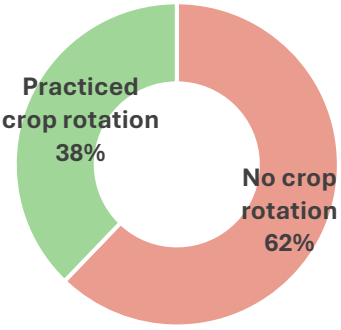
70%

of **parcels are loamy,** 25% are mixed, and the rest – either sandy or clay

Slash-and-burn remains the primary practice for land preparation (over half of all farmers declare using it). Repeated slash-and-burn practices threaten soil organic matter and long-term biodiversity. Soil health is further compromised by the lack of modern management. For example, the majority of parcels (62 percent) are cultivated without crop rotation, significantly increasing the risk of nutrient depletion. Furthermore, productivity is hampered by a lack of infrastructure and limited input use: only 2.9 percent of parcels are irrigated, 21.2 percent of farmers utilize inorganic fertilizer, and only 12.2 percent use pesticides.

53.6%

of farmers practised **slash-and-burn**

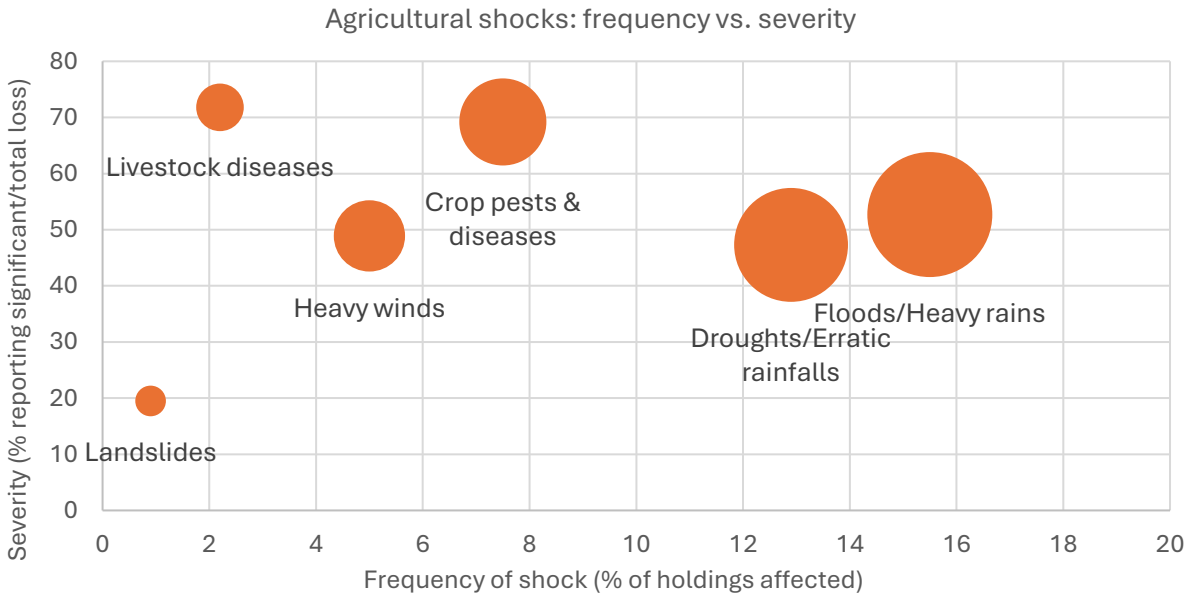


Only **2.9%** of parcels are served by **irrigation infrastructures**

Share of farmers using	Inorganic fertilizers	Organic fertilizers	Pesticides
	21.2%	**26.4%**	**12.2%**

Climate shocks and vulnerability

Because of a near-total dependence on rainfall and a widespread lack of erosion control, climate shocks are frequent disruptors to livelihoods for farmers in Sierra Leone. Floods affect 15 percent of farmers, leading to severe consequences for 53 percent of those impacted (severe or almost total losses), while droughts are reported by 13 percent of holdings, with 47 percent suffering significant or total losses.



Note: The area of the circles is proportional to the number of affected agricultural holdings.

The lack of preparation for biological threats is an important source of losses. For instance, while the occurrence of pests and diseases affecting crops is relatively low (7.5 percent of farmers), their severity is reported as high for 69 percent of affected farmers. Similarly, livestock diseases are relatively rare, affecting only 2.2 percent of agricultural households, yet, when they materialize, these shocks are reported as severe by 72 percent of the farmers impacted. This combination of frequent weather shocks and highly severe biological outbreaks creates a precarious landscape for smallholders.

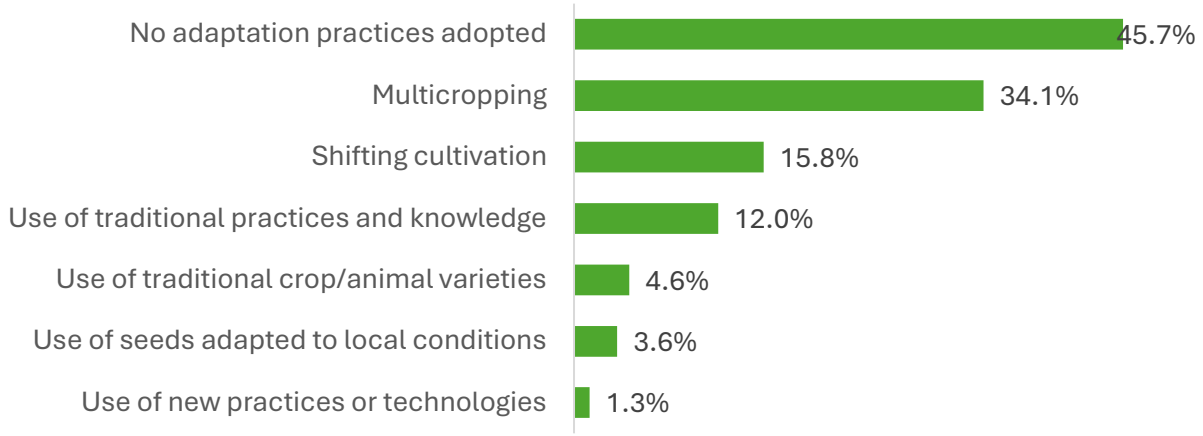
855 000
holdings reported **crop losses** due to shocks

26 000
holdings reported **livestock losses**

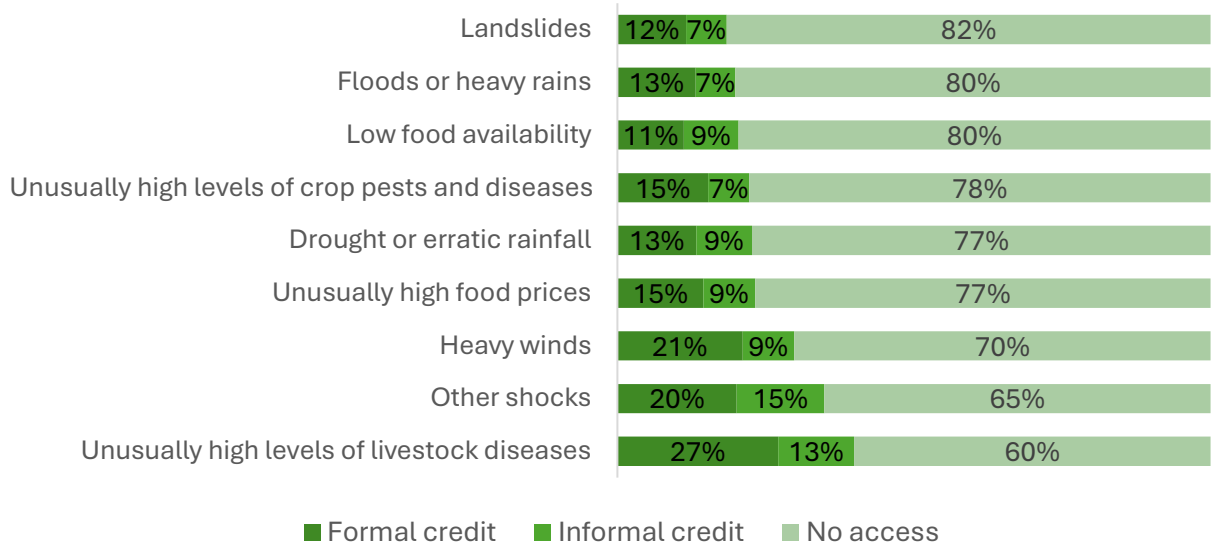
15 000
holdings **lost land** due to environmental shocks

Resilience and adaptation

As shocks intensify, the capacity of farmers to adapt is lagging. Currently, almost half of the farmers (46 percent) in Sierra Leone have no adaptation practices in place. The primary defense mechanism remains multicropping, practiced by 34 percent of holdings. Shifting cultivation, applied by 15.8 percent of farmers, serves as a traditional response but requires ample land availability to be sustainable. Meanwhile, the adoption of modern resilience tools is virtually non-existent, pioneered by only 1.3 percent of holdings.



The lack of access of agricultural households to adequate financial resources hampers their ability to invest in and adopt resilient practices: over 60 percent of farmers report having no credit access following a shock, leaving them without the resources required to break the cycle of low productivity and high vulnerability.



Technical Annex

Sources and scope

All the indicators produced in this brief can be considered as statistically representative at the geographical scale at which they are presented. Definitions below are provided by Statistics Sierra Leone. For full details, please refer to:

Statistics Sierra Leone. 2025. Sierra Leone Annual Agricultural Survey Report 2024. Freetown, Sierra Leone.
https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/2024_SierraLeone_Annual_Agricultural_Survey_Report.pdf

- Agricultural area: includes 1) cultivated area, or area that could be brought back into cultivation using the resources normally available on an agricultural holding; 2) arable land; 3) permanent grassland; 4) area used for permanent crops; 5) kitchen gardens; 6) unutilized agricultural area; and 7) special holding areas.
- Agricultural holding: economic unit of agricultural production under single management comprising all livestock kept, and all land used wholly or partly for agricultural production purposes, without regard to title, legal form or size.
- Agricultural household (farming household): a household with members practicing own account agricultural activities.
- Organic fertilizers: includes solid manure, liquid manure/slurry, vegetable material and compost, stabilized sewage sludge, bio stimulants, and other organic fertilizers.
- Inorganic fertilizers: include urea, other nitrogenous fertilizers, superphosphates (above 35 percent of P_2O_5), other phosphatic fertilizers, potassium chloride (MOP), other potassic fertilizers, NPK, diammonium phosphate (DAP), and other inorganic fertilizers.
- Pesticides: include insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, and rodenticides.

The data presented in this brief are sourced from countries' surveys and may differ from data published on other FAO platforms.

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