

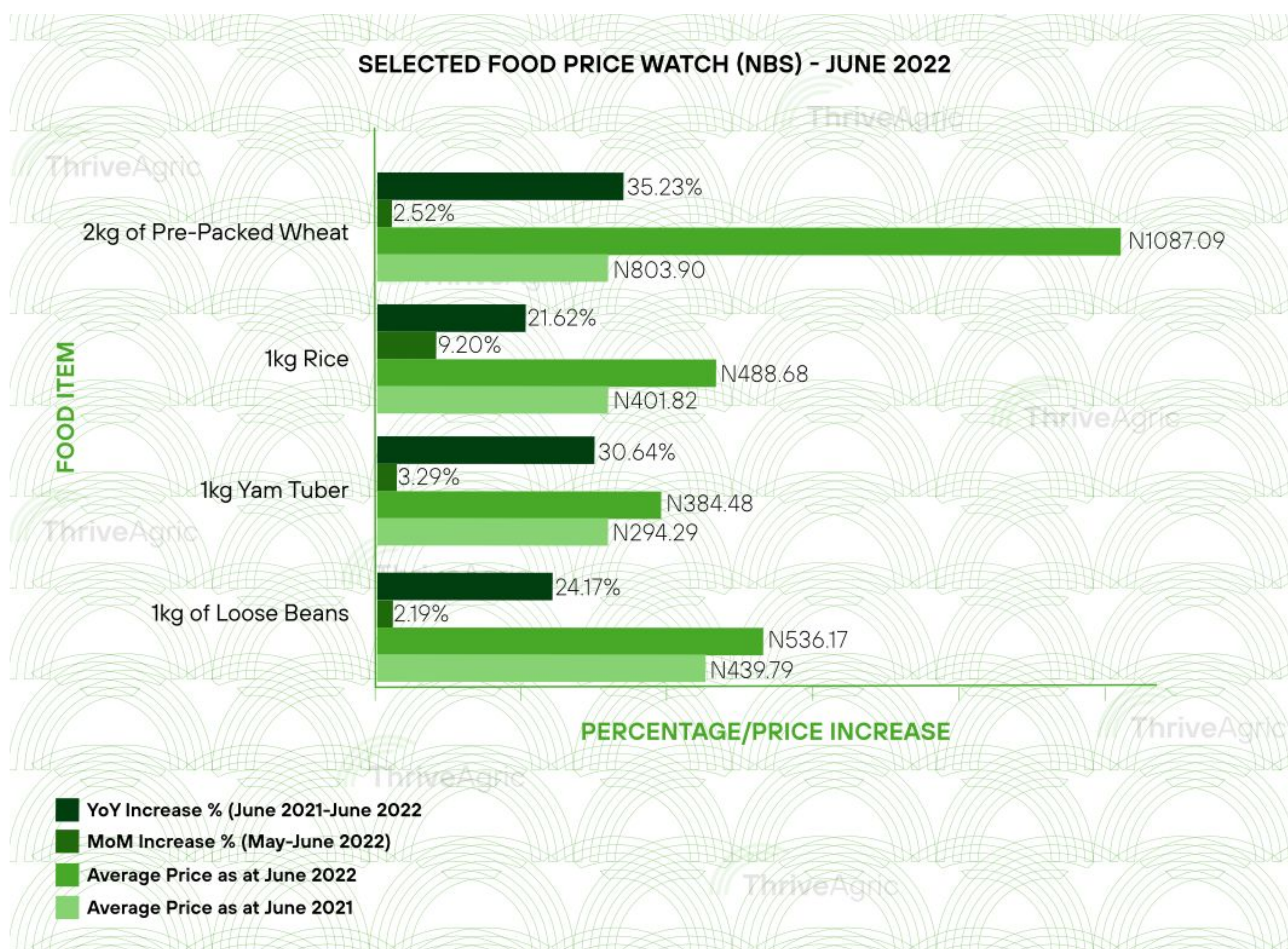
Finding Alternatives in Nigeria's Food Crisis

The food crisis plaguing a lot of the world has not left Nigeria untouched.

National and global macroeconomic trends such as inflation, energy price spikes, and the Russia-Ukraine war have affected food imports and caused supply disruptions. Weather extremes and ecological changes have affected crop yields and harvest quantity. Persistent conflicts in the country's North-East region and rising insecurity in the Middle Belt, North-West, and South-West have also constrained agricultural activities in some of the most productive farming areas of the country.

All of these have caused more people to fall into food insecurity of varying degrees, with prices rising to alarming levels due to diminishing supply. Food inflation rose to a whopping **20.6%** in June 2022 from 19.5% [recorded in May 2022](#). These increases are seen in staple foods such as wheat, rice, and yam.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) [Selected Food Price Watch](#) for the month of June 2022, the infographic below captures the situation aptly:



In a scenario such as this with surging prices, alternatives must be sought bearing in mind changing costs, dietary substitutes in consumption patterns, as well as possible methods of production and distribution.

The question is, do these alternatives exist?

Substitutes To Staple Foods

Food insecurity is likely to lead to poor consumption patterns and feeding practices (undernourishment and malnutrition), due to inaccessibility of some foods for families as well as changing frequency and diversity.



Rice is a staple food in most Nigerian homes. While the NBS [reveals](#) that imported high quality sold loose now costs an average of N636.20, its counterparts '**Ofada Rice**' and '**Local Rice**' sell for an average of N527.73 and N488.68 respectively. Families may be best served to switch to cheaper variants in this period, such as those locally produced by **Gerawa Rice Mills** and **Stallion Group**, who receive homegrown supply from ThriveAgric¹.



Wheat is the third-most consumed grain in Nigeria after maize and rice; which is used to produce foods such as bread, cereal, semolina, couscous, pasta, and noodles. However, unlike the previous two, of which Nigeria produces a sizable amount, local wheat production is remarkably small in scale. As a result, the country has to import to meet more than 95% of its demand, which is really high.

To counter this gap, players in the agriculture ecosystem should be supported to boost uptake; similar to ThriveAgric which commenced wheat farming in collaboration with the Central Bank of Nigeria in 2021 and has generated close to 600 metric tonnes so far.

Finding substitutes to these staples may be difficult, especially in households with young children. However, the solution may lie in switching from wheat-based foods to those based on other grains which Nigeria produces a lot of internally.

Maize powder, or *ogi* as it is more commonly known, is a popular corn-based meal that may be used to replace wheat-based cereals as breakfast food. Ogi can also be made from **sorghum**, the fourth-most consumed grain which like maize, is also largely produced in Nigeria. According to [Asoko Insights](#), internal production has been able to meet 100% of demand since 2019. Sorghum can thrive in drier ecologies and thus withstand weather inconsistencies.

Along with **millet**, another internally-produced grain, can be used as the base for baking bread, easing the reliance on wheat. These grains are already used in a lot of staple foods in the northern parts of the country, with thick porridge, *tuwo*, being one of the meals most in demand. It remains to be seen whether the same popularity would extend to the southern parts of the country. Maize, however, still stands at an average of N321.04 per kg for those who can still afford it².

Similar foods to *tuwo* which are more prevalent in the south of Nigeria are **cassava** based, e.g. *garri/eba*, and *fufu*. Despite price increases, these foods, including tapioca, remain some of the most affordable meals. According to the [same report](#) by the NBS, despite a year-on-year increase of 2.55%, white garri is still sold for an average of N332.53, relatively cheaper than its counterpart, yellow garri.

1. ThriveAgric produced & traded close to 5000 metric tonnes of rice in 2021

2. Since 2018, ThriveAgric has generated over 62,000 metric tonnes of maize to bridge Nigeria's demand gap

Yam is another popular Nigerian food, often eaten as boiled, roasted, fried or porridge. However, given its rise as stated in the infographic on page 1, sweet potato serves as a potential substitute, costing an average of N247.91 per kg.

Even **animal protein** has also seen price hikes.

Nigeria has always been a large fish importer with about 2.4 million metric tonnes of frozen produce brought in annually, and this has undoubtedly further dissipated the country's foreign exchange reserves.

Russia playing such a large role becomes a cause for concern, as supply has dwindled, which is reflected in the price increases. According to the NBS report, frozen mackerel, dried catfish, and boneless beef sell for an average of N1,459.82, N2,156.64, and N2,079.93 per kg, respectively.

With internal fish production unable to meet demand due to challenges around logistics/transportation, households may consider marginally cheaper alternatives; frozen titus at N1,604.47 and fresh tilapia at N1,189.43, per kg. You may also be advised to rely on animal products like eggs as occasional substitutes for protein. Price of one agric egg of medium size is said to sell at N68.56 or N704.19 for an entire crate.

Full price comparisons across multiple food items can be found in the **NBS Selected Food Price Watch** for the month of June 2022.

How Can Consumers Make Choices?

The most significant decision will be consuming more locally-produced foods.

Families may be concerned that cheaper food substitutes could be less nutritious, however, there is not much difference between the grains. While maize and sorghum contain considerably less protein than wheat, they are both richer in fiber than the latter. All three grains, along with millet contain similar levels of sugar, starch, and carbohydrates, with wheat having fewer lipids and ash in its composition than the others. Rice is the most nutrient-heavy grain.

Just like maize, sorghum, and millet, carbohydrate tubers such as yam, cocoyam, potatoes, and cassava are all produced internally. They have not been immune to the price increase, as Nigeria remains a net importer of fertilizers. However, seeing as the feedstock is not imported, their prices have stayed within the range of affordability.

With energy prices projected to continue rising, geopolitical tensions growing and supply chain disruptions not looking likely to be abated anytime soon, imported food will remain expensive in the near future.

This is why at ThriveAgric, our focus is to strengthen the foundation of the different value chains in our agriculture industry - the smallholder farmers, towards increasing local food production, and promoting more commercial than subsistence farming - essentially putting more food on tables.

