

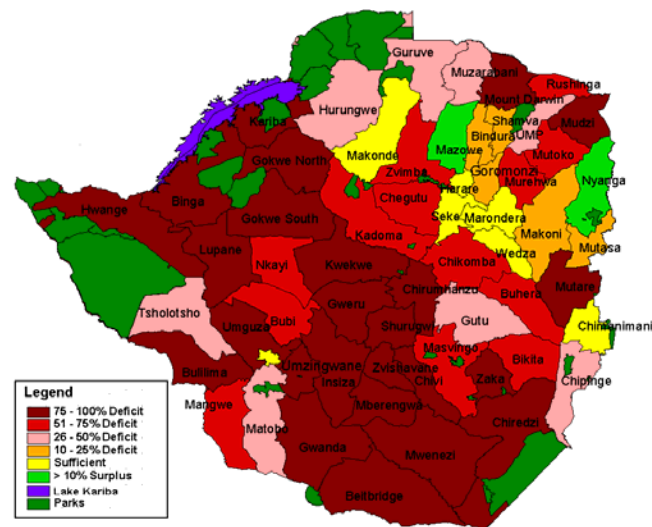
ZIMBABWE Food Security Alert

June 5, 2008

Drastically reduced yields leave widespread cereal deficits for year ahead

Zimbabwe's 2007/08 summer maize crop is estimated at 470,700 MT, just under half of last year's production and 39 percent of the five-year average. This, combined with small grains production that was also only 78 percent of last season's production and 71 percent of the five-year average, has led to total cereal production this season that is anticipated to meet only 28 percent of the country's consumption needs for the current marketing year (not taking into consideration the now empty Strategic Grain Reserve (SGR), Grain Marketing Board (GMB) stocks, household stocks retained by farmers, or planned imports). This level of production leaves a deficit of 1,428,360 MT that must be met by commercial and humanitarian imports. While these imports have together met production deficits in recent years, the deficit this year is substantially larger – and the economy significantly weaker – leaving a larger role for the humanitarian sector. However, high levels of political interference and the potential for civil unrest are likely to disrupt humanitarian food distributions, adding to access problems across the country during the marketing year. Unless imports and international assistance are made available, households in urban areas and districts in the south and west producing less than four months of their annual requirements (Figure 1) will face severe food access problems beginning in June, with similar shortages developing throughout the country in the following months.

Figure 1. Estimated contribution of 2007/08 maize and small grains production to annual cereal requirements by district



Source: Ministry of Agriculture

Figure 2. Summer cereal production, 1999-2008

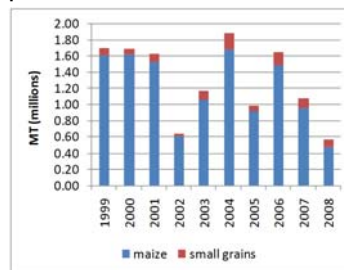
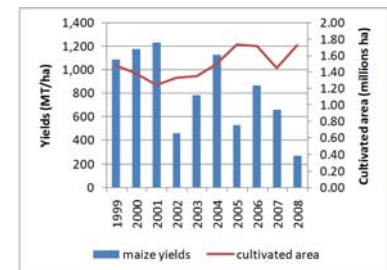


Figure 3. Maize yields and areas cultivated, 1999-2008



Source: Ministry of Agriculture

The continued deterioration of the economy makes it increasingly difficult for the country to close the cereal gap without significant international assistance. The GMB is trying to purchase as much maize as it can to replenish the SGR and maintain control over the country's grain supply. The producer price has been raised to encourage farmers to sell, but the GMB's poor payment system is likely to discourage such transactions, and few farmers are likely to sell their grain given the seven digit inflation and poor crop production this season.

The drastic reduction in this season's production has been attributed to several factors, including incessant heavy rainfall in December and January, a dry spell in February and March, the late availability of maize seed, and shortages of fuel, fertilizer, labor, and finances to support agriculture. Over the last 10 years, while the total area under maize cultivation has increased, yields and production have continued to decline (Figures 2 and 3). This year's maize yields, at 0.27 MT/ha, are the lowest on record.

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