

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Zambia Depends on Corn Imports to Maintain Food Security

Country: Zambia

Post: Pretoria

Report Category: Grain and Feed

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Report Highlights:

Zambia's production of its staple crop, corn, is expected to drop by more than 50 percent in marketing year 2024/25, due to extended dry spells associated with the El Niño event. Almost a million hectares of corn have been destroyed by the drought that forced the Zambian President to declare a "National Disaster and Emergency". Post estimates that Zambia could import approximately 1 million metric tons of corn in marketing year 2024/25 to meet local demand and mandated strategic food reserves. As a result, the Zambia government authorized the private sector to import corn, albeit only genetically engineered free corn will be permitted. The cultivation of genetically engineered corn is still prohibited in Zambia. However, the country has made strides towards revising its biosafety policy, which will give momentum to revamped biosafety legislation, changing the current restrictive approach to biotechnology to a more science-based and enabling environment.

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY USDA STAFF AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

Executive Summary

Post estimates that Zambia could import approximately 1 million metric tons (MMT) of corn in marketing year (MY) 2024/25 to maintain food security. This calculation is based on a more than 50 percent drop in corn production to 1.6 MMT, and after making provision for about 500,000 metric tons (MT) of corn stocks held as a strategic food reserve. Extreme drought conditions associated with the *El Niño* event resulted in total crop failure in many regions of Zambia. Corn is the single most important crop in Zambia and is the national staple food. Corn production in Zambia is dominated by smallholder farmers who have limited access to irrigation technologies. As a result, most of the corn production is entirely dependent on rainfall.

Following a declaration of a “National Disaster and Emergency” by the President, the government has authorized the private sector to import white and yellow corn. However, one of the primary conditions for the importation of corn is a “Genetically Modified Organism” free certificate from the country of origin. This requirement essentially limits Zambia’s corn imports to its neighboring country, Tanzania, as it largely excludes corn imports from South Africa, the main producer of corn in southern Africa. More than 85 percent of corn in South Africa is planted with genetically engineered seeds and despite the impact of the *El Niño* induced drought, excess corn of more than 1 MMT will be available for export.

Corn

Production

Zambia's corn crop is expected to drop by more than 50 percent to 1.6 MMT in MY 2024/25 (May 2024 to April 2025) due to extreme drought conditions associated with the *El Niño* event. This is the smallest corn crop produced in Zambia over the past 15 years. The season started off well with a 20 percent upsurge in planted corn area driven by elevated domestic price and at the expense of soybean area. However, prolonged dry spells overlapped with crucial vegetative and flowering stages for corn, and with February being the driest and hottest month since 1981, resulted in total crop failure in many regions of Zambia. The provinces that were severely impacted by the drought included, Central, Copperbelt, Eastern, Lusaka, Northwestern, Southern and Western (also see Figure 1). Together these provinces represent about 75 percent of Zambia's corn production in a normal year. The northern provinces were less affected by the drought. Almost a million hectares (MHa) of corn out of an estimated 2.3 MHa planted area have been destroyed by the drought. In response to the drought, Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema, declared a "National Disaster and Emergency" on February 29, 2024, as the drought had devastating consequences on many critical sectors such as agriculture, water availability, energy, and food security. An estimated 6.6 million people across the country have been impacted by the drought, and the Zambian government estimates that about \$941 million is needed to provide life-saving assistance to the people affected.

Figure 1

Map of Zambia



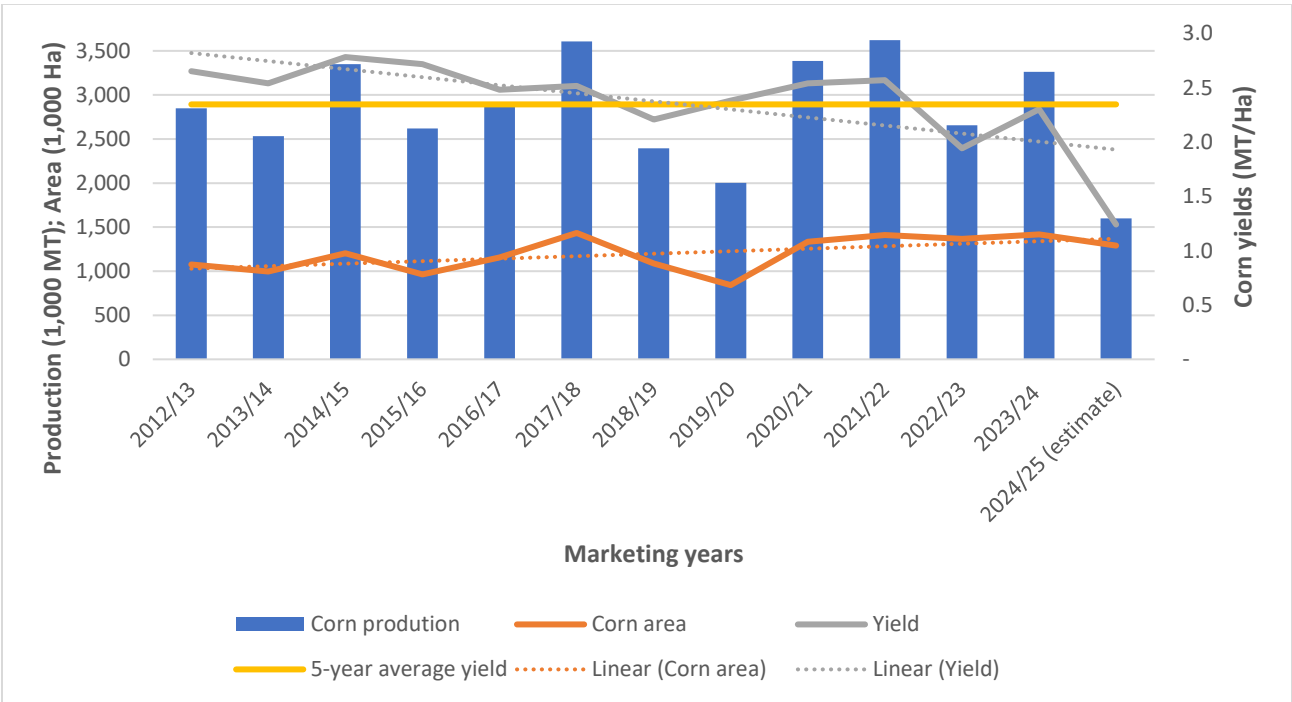
Source: World Atlas

The agricultural sector in Zambia is dominated by smallholder farmers who have limited access to irrigation technologies. As a result, more than 90 percent of corn production is entirely dependent on rainfall. However, to improve the productivity of smallholder farmers, the Zambian government introduced the Farmer Input Support Program (FISP) program in 2009. The FISP supplies government-subsidized seed and fertilizer to smallholder famers. In the 2023/24 production season, more than a million smallholder farmers received 10 kilograms (kg) of corn seed, 300 kg of fertilizer, and a bag of seed of an alternative crop like groundnuts, soybeans, rice, etc. The Zambian government has reiterated that they will continue supporting small-scale farmers with agricultural inputs in future.

The expected corn yield of 1.2 MT/Ha in MY 2024/25 is 48 percent lower than the 5-year average corn yield of 2.3 MT/Ha for Zambia. However, notwithstanding the drought, corn yields in Zambia have been on a negative trajectory over the past 10 years, while higher production was mainly driven by expanded area (see Figure 2). The cultivation of genetically engineered (GE) corn is still prohibited in Zambia. However, the country has made strides towards revising its biosafety policy. This positions Zambia as more pro-biotechnology, and the revised policy is expected to give momentum to a change in biosafety legislation from the currently restrictive approach to a more science-based and enabling environment. These changes could help Zambia to improve yields, combat outbreaks of pests and diseases and soften the impact of future droughts.

Figure 2

Zambia’s Corn Production and Yield Trends



Sources: Zambia’s Ministry of Agriculture and Post estimates

Post travelled to Zambia in late April with the primary objective to attain a preliminary assessment of the agricultural situation in the context of the drought. Consultations were scheduled with the Zambia agricultural industry, including, the Zambian Seed Trade Association, Zambia National Farmers Union, millers, and traders, and the Zambian government, including the National Biosafety Authority. Post also met with the World Food Program and specialist agencies of the United Nations. Post learned that a drop of between 40 percent and 60 percent in the corn crop is expected for MY 2024/25 as a total of 84 districts out of 116 districts in seven provinces were significantly affected by unprecedented prolonged dry spells since mid-January 2024.

Table 1 indicates the area harvested, yield, and production of corn in Zambia for the past three marketing years. Almost all the corn planted in Zambia is white corn and is mainly used for human consumption.

Table 1

Zambia’s Corn Planted Area and Production

MY	Area planted (1,000 ha)	Area harvested (1,000 ha)	Yield (MT/ha)	Prod. (1,000 MT)
2022/23	1,507	1,368	1.9	2,654
2023/24	1,896	1,418	2.3	3,262
2024/25 (estimate)	2,273	1,290	1.2	1,600

Source: Post estimates and Zambia’s Ministry of Agriculture

Consumption

Corn is the single most important crop in Zambia. It is widely grown by smallholder farmers and is the national staple food in the form of a porridge called “nshima.” Corn provides about 60 percent of the caloric requirements of Zambia’s population of approximately 20 million. In addition to corn, Zambians also consume wheat, sorghum, cassava, and rice as sources of carbohydrates. Post estimates that human consumption of corn will drop by 7 percent to 2.0 MMT in MY 2024/25 on availability and rising prices of corn due to the drought (see Table 2). Industrial requirements are estimated at about 150,000 MT, while corn for animal feed for the poultry and livestock industries is estimated at around 300,000 MT. Post-harvest losses are estimated at about 5 percent of production. Thus, Zambia’s total domestic demand for corn in MY 2024/25 is estimated at 2.5 MMT a drop of 9 percent from MY2023/24. The struggling domestic economy, coupled with relatively high inflation rates for most agricultural products due to the drought, hinders any growth in the demand for corn.

Zambia’s annual inflation rate increased to a 26-month high from 13.7 percent to 13.8 percent in April 2024. The growing inflation has mainly been driven by the rise in the food inflation and may continue to increase due to a renewed weakness in the currency that accelerates local prices.

The Zambian economy grew by just 2.7 percent in 2023, as contractions in mining and energy and a cholera epidemic strained the growth prospects. The economy is expected to remain weak in 2024 due to the drought and electricity crisis, although Zambia has concluded a long-delayed debt restructuring plan with the International Monetary Fund after defaulting on its sovereign debt in 2020.

Table 2

Demand for Corn in Zambia

MY	Food	Animal feed	Industrial	Losses	Other	TOTAL
			(1,000 MT)			
2022/23	2,000	305	140	145	75	2,665
2023/24	2,100	315	150	160	75	2,800
2024/25 (estimate)	1,950	300	150	80	60	2,540

Source: Post estimates and Zambia’s Ministry of Agriculture

Trade

Post estimates that Zambia could import approximately 1 million MT of corn in MY 2024/25, based on a more than 50 percent drop in production and after making provision for about 500,000 MT of corn stocks held as a strategic food reserve. The Zambian Food Reserve Agency (FRA) has the mandate to buy corn annually to keep as a national strategic food reserve. The purpose of the national strategic food reserve is to ensure a reliable supply of corn for Zambia during shortfalls in supply, which might arise due to droughts, floods, or other natural disasters.

In April 2024, the Zambian government authorized the private sector to import white and yellow corn. The mandate started April 19, 2024, and is expected to run up to April 30, 2025. However, one of the primary conditions for the importation of corn is a “Genetically Modified Organism” (GMO) free certificate from the country of origin. This requirement essentially limits Zambia’s corn imports to its neighboring country, Tanzania, as it largely excludes corn imports from South Africa, where more than 85 percent of corn is planted with genetically engineered seeds. South Africa is the main producer of corn in southern Africa, and despite the impact of the *El Niño* induced drought will have excess corn of more than 1 million MT available for export.

Post estimates Zambia exported approximately 500,000 MT of corn in MY 2023/24. However, in response to the drought, the Zambian government has imposed restrictions on corn and mealie meal (corn flour) exports in February 2024. The government has deployed defense personnel to guard all known smuggling routes, while security patrols and roadblocks are also being enhanced in districts bordering neighboring countries. Post believes the embargo on corn exports will be enforced until at least the end of MY 2024/25. As a landlocked country, Zambia usually focuses on neighboring countries for corn exports. Zambia’s prohibition of corn exports is greatly affecting the southern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which depend

heavily on Zambia for corn as a staple food. As a result, Zambia is allowing corn flour imports from South Africa to the DRC to be transported through the country. South Africa has exported more than 300,000 MT of corn flour to the DRC in MY 2023/24, and this is to continue into MY 2024/25.

At the start of MY 2022/23, Zambia had a record 1.5 MMT of corn available. In August 2022, the government announced an upsurge in the demand for Zambian corn in East Africa, especially from Kenya, which was suffering from drought conditions. In addition, Zambia’s regional neighbors, including Malawi, Angola, Mozambique, and Namibia, also expressed interest in corn imports from Zambia to meet consumption needs. As a result, Post estimates Zambia exported almost 1.1 million tons of corn in MY 2022/23.

Stocks

Post estimates Zambia’s corn ending stocks at almost 500,000 MT in MY 2024/25, in line with the national strategic food reserve mandate. Post estimates corn stocks at the end of MY 2023/24 at 422,000 MT, 6 percent less than the 450,000 MT ending stocks in MY 2022/23. Zambia has a formal storage capacity totaling more than 2 MMT.

Table 3

Corn Production, Supply, and Distribution

Corn Market Year Begins Zambia	2022/2023		2023/2024		2024/2025	
	May 2022		May 2023		May 2024	
	USDA Official	New Post	USDA Official	New Post	USDA Official	New Post
Area Harvested (1000 HA)	1368	1368	1418	1418	600	1290
Beginning Stocks (1000 MT)	1501	1501	465	450	513	422
Production (1000 MT)	2654	2654	3263	3262	1000	1600
MY Imports (1000 MT)	10	10	10	10	15	1000
TY Imports (1000 MT)	10	10	10	10	15	1000
TY Imp. from U.S. (1000 MT)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Supply (1000 MT)	4165	4165	3738	3722	1528	3022
MY Exports (1000 MT)	1000	1050	400	500	50	0
TY Exports (1000 MT)	500	500	200	200	50	0
Feed and Residual (1000 MT)	450	450	475	475	100	380
FSI Consumption (1000 MT)	2250	2215	2350	2325	1300	2160
Total Consumption (1000 MT)	2700	2665	2825	2800	1400	2540
Ending Stocks (1000 MT)	465	450	513	422	78	482
Total Distribution (1000 MT)	4165	4165	3738	3722	1528	3022
Yield (MT/HA)	1.9	1.9	2.3	2.3	1.7	1.2

(1000 HA) ,(1000 MT) ,(MT/HA)

MY = Marketing Year, begins with the month listed at the top of each column

TY = Trade Year, which for Corn begins in October for all countries. TY 2024/2025 = October 2024 - September 2025

OFFICIAL DATA CAN BE ACCESSED AT: [PSD Online Advanced Query](#)

Attachments:

No Attachments.