



# Zimbabwe Food Security Brief

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Office of the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator

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**This Food Security Brief is a joint effort of FAO, WFP, UNDP, FEWSNET and the UN Humanitarian Co-ordinator's office/RRU in consultation with government and partners. Its purpose is to contribute to the co-ordination and planning of humanitarian activities and encourage dialogue.**

## AGROMET UPDATE

The wet spell experienced in March is expected to continue well into the first ten days of April and then taper off as the rainy season draws to a close. There have been some reports of water logging and leaching (especially in Matebeleland North) and cob rot (in Mashonaland West) due to excessive rains. Most of the late planted crops are generally in good condition and have reached the reproductive and vegetative stages<sup>1</sup>. The extended rainy season will likely improve yields from the late-planted crop. The late rains may delay land preparations for the winter crops, mainly wheat.

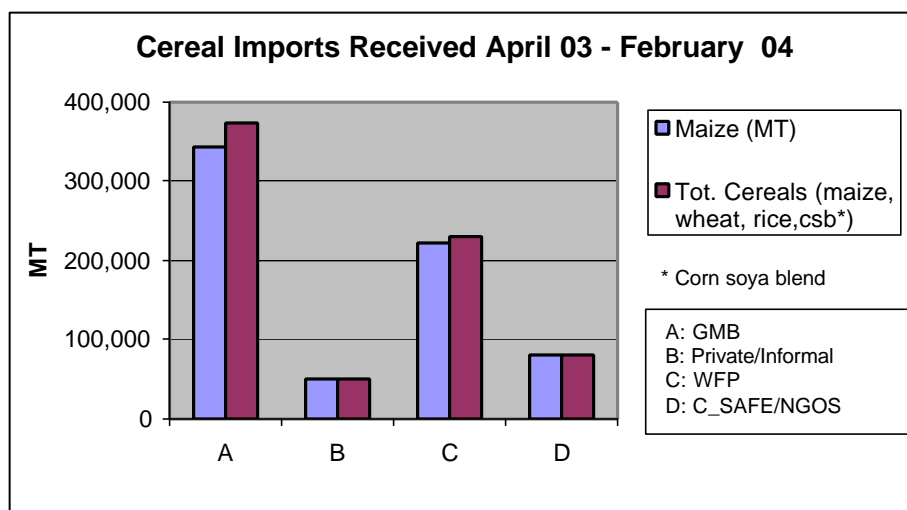
## CEREAL PRODUCTION UPDATE

The latest estimates for the area planted to maize range between 1.3 and 1.5 million hectares as of mid-March. Based on historical yield data, as well as limited availability and high prices of inputs during the planting season, a total maize production in the range of 1.2 to 1.5 million MT is expected, which is approximately 67 to 80% of national maize requirements.

The anticipated maize production represents an improvement from last year. However, it will not be sufficient to cover domestic requirements for the coming year. The Government has invited FAO and WFP to field a joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission to help confirm the food security situation and provide recommendations for appropriate interventions. The mission is tentatively scheduled to begin late April.

## CEREAL IMPORTS 2003/04

During the 2002/03 season, maize production was about 900,000MT, against total requirements of 1,800,000MT. Around 695,000MT were imported between April 2003 and February 2004, which is 71% of the projected deficit. The imports were carried out by: GMB, 353,566MT (49% of the deficit); WFP, 222,354MT (32%); C-SAFE and other NGOs, 80,000MT (11%). Approximately 50,000MT (7%) have also been imported either informally or by private traders.



## FOOD SECURITY POLICY ANALYSIS WORKSHOP

The SADC Food and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), with financial support from DFID through Overseas Development Institute, organized at the end of March a national workshop on "The Food Security Situation and Policy Challenges for Zimbabwe in 2004". The overall objective of the workshop, with stakeholders representing government, private sector and international organizations, was to develop national consensus on policies aimed at strengthening food security recovery and protecting the vulnerable. Participants recommended liberalization of the cereal marketing systems to stimulate local production. It was agreed that sustainable food security could only be achieved if producers would be able to generate profits through cereal production. It was also agreed that, given a conducive policy and market environment, the private sector can play a more significant role to help meet the cereal gaps. For more details, contact FANRPAN on [policy@fanrpan.org](mailto:policy@fanrpan.org).

<sup>1</sup> Crops planted in December 2003

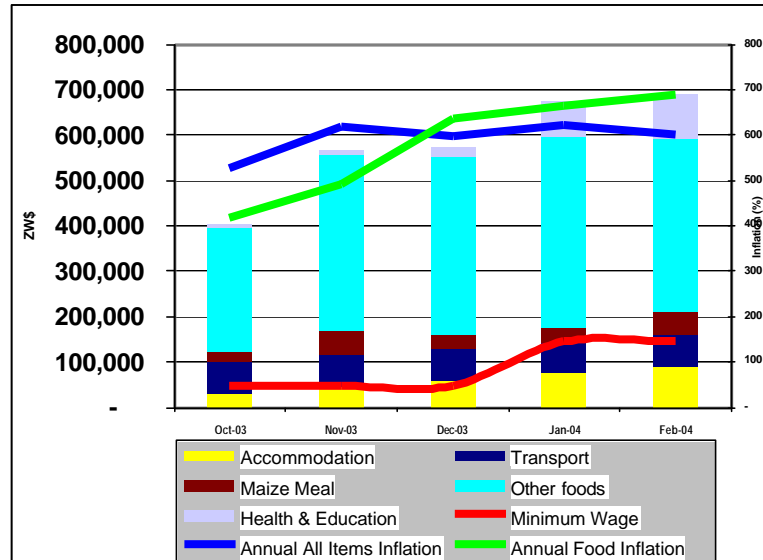
## REGIONAL CEREAL PRODUCTION OUTLOOK

Although the crop-growing conditions improved during the second half of the season, the region still expects a below normal crop harvest for this season. The latest maize production estimate for South Africa is 7.7 million MT (19% less than 9.4 million MT harvested last year)<sup>2</sup>. Of the six countries that experienced food deficits last year, only Zambia is expecting a surplus. Lesotho and Swaziland have already declared a state of emergency, and these two countries, along with Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe have formally requested FAO and WFP to field joint FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment Missions in the coming months.

## SOCIO –ECONOMIC UPDATE

Basic food products have remained mostly available on both the formal and the parallel markets, although some rural areas also reported constraints in terms of availability. High inflation is decreasing real incomes, and high unemployment levels continue to reduce purchasing power for the majority of households. Food inflation for February rose 23.7 percent, to 689.4 percent compared to January 2004<sup>3</sup>. The value of the CCZ monthly expenditure basket for a low-income urban household of six stood at ZW\$907,055 in February 2004, which is considerably above the new monthly minimum wage of about ZW\$145,000. Sharp increases in costs of transport; accommodation, health and education have had a severe effect on families. Many workers have to walk to work, children are dropping out of school and basic health costs can no longer be covered<sup>4</sup>.

**Figure 2:** Cost of monthly expenditure basket for a low-income urban household of six in Harare, July 2003 – Jan. 2004



Source: CCZ and CSO

## CEREAL PRODUCTION STRATEGY

The Government's cereal production plan envisages a significant increase in the area under production in order to meet domestic consumption requirements<sup>5</sup>. Achieving this plan will require sufficient funding, ensuring adequate inputs, and improving infrastructure and policy adjustments to encourage intensified production. Increasing and stabilizing the local cereal production is a priority shared by all partners. However, it may be more effective to increase production intensity and yield levels, than increasing the overall areas. For example, improved agricultural practices can enable communal farmers to produce in excess of 1.0MT per hectare, which is already an improvement to national production. A liberalized market would encourage large-scale producers to engage more in maize production, where yield levels of 5 to 8MT per hectare can be expected. Overall production levels of 1.5 to 2MT per hectare are feasible through combined interventions, including: improved agricultural practices, ensuring adequate inputs and market-based prices. In this scenario, a production area of 1.5 million hectares would potentially yield 2 to 3 million MT, which is well above domestic requirements. Especially for the short-term, and to enhance agricultural recovery, it would be more feasible to achieve increased productivity on 1.5 million hectares than to expand the area under production to the targeted 3.5 million hectares.

**For more information, please contact any of the contributing agencies. The next issue of the food security brief will be available by mid May 2004. This brief is available on the RRU website: [www.zimrelief.info](http://www.zimrelief.info)**



<sup>2</sup> Crop Estimates Committee of South Africa

<sup>3</sup> Consumer Council of Zimbabwe (CCZ) figures

<sup>4</sup> Over 50% of the poor households are in school arrears, according to the ZimVac urban assessment report, March 2004

<sup>5</sup> The government cropping plan for the 03/04 season as presented at FANRPAN workshop, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2004