

ZIMBABWE Food Security Alert

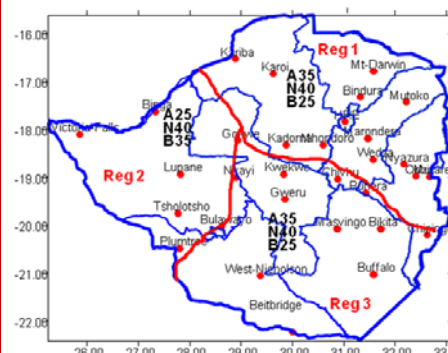
November 4, 2008

Forecasts, input shortages indicate bleak prospects for 2008/09 production

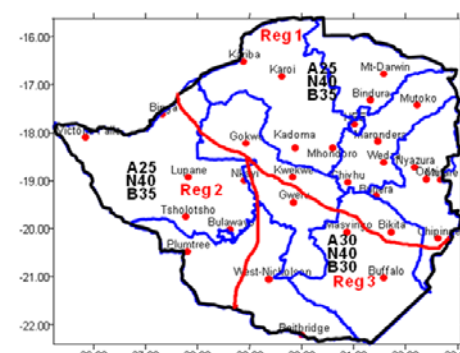
Seasonal forecasts suggest that timely planting of maize this season is essential to avoid another poor production season, but shortages of seed and fertilizer are likely to prevent most farmers from planting on time (November through mid-December). Recent forecasts by the Zimbabwe Meteorological Services and the Southern Africa Regional Climate Outlook Forum (SARCOF) indicate an increased likelihood of normal to below-normal rainfall over Zimbabwe's more productive regions (the northeast, including the Mashonaland provinces) during the second half (January-March) of the 2008/09 rainfall season (Figure 1). The forecast for the first half of the season is generally

Figure 1 Zimbabwe MET forecasts for 2008/09 rainfall season

Forecast for OND 2008 (first half)



Forecast for JFM 2009 (second half)



Source: MET Department

Table 1. Availability of key agricultural inputs – end of September 2008

Inputs	National requirement (MT)	Projected availability (MT)	Current stocks (MT)	Current stocks as % of requirement
Compound D	600,000	109,608	14,090	2
Top dressing	400,000	57,310	4,474	1
Maize seed	50,000	32,259	9,725	19

Source: Ministry of Agriculture

more favorable, with an increased likelihood for normal to above-normal rains over these regions. If the forecast holds, timely access to inputs will be essential to enable farmers to take advantage of favorable conditions in the first half of the season so that maize crops are more established by the time the rains are expected to decline. However, Zimbabwe is facing critical shortages of all key agricultural inputs (Table 1), and without significant agricultural support interventions and improved access to inputs, it is highly unlikely that timely planting will be possible. Given current economic turmoil, political instability, and the necessity to direct resources to import and distribute food, improving access to inputs remains a challenge.

Cereal production was exceptionally poor in the 2007/08 season, due to erratic rainfall, significant moisture deficits, and poor access to fuel and fertilizer. Seeds, however, were generally available. This season, similar fuel and fertilizer shortages prevail, but seed availability is severely constrained. Currently available maize seed meets only 19 percent of the requirement (based on a target of two million hectares planted, 15 percent more than the 1.7 million hectares planted last year). If estimated local seed production and planned imports are taken into account, projected seed availability could cover up to 65 percent of this requirement. However, it is unlikely that all of this seed will be available by mid-December, the cut-off for viable planting. Fertilizers are first applied a few weeks after crops emerge. However, current availability stands at one percent of needs for top dressing fertilizer (ammonium nitrate) and two percent of needs for Compound D (nitrogen, phosphates, and potash). Projected availability meets only 14 percent of needs for top dressing and 18 percent for Compound D. Given the critical shortages of seed and fertilizers, 2008/09 harvest prospects are poor unless resources can be quickly mobilized to address these shortages.