

Climate advisory for the 2017/2018 summer season

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries shares the following in their 2017/2018 summer climate advisory. The focus is on, among other things, continued dry conditions in the Western Cape and areas in the Northern and Eastern Cape as well as the uncertainty of the specific direction of rainfall during late spring. Dryland summer crop farmers are advised to wait for sufficient moisture before planting. Livestock farmers are advised to keep precautionary measures in place regarding drought and grazing management.



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Drought continues in winter rainfall areas as a result of persistent below normal rainfall which extended from the previous winter. Other regions of the country such as parts of the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape are also drought stricken. In areas not affected by drought, winter crops are reportedly in good condition. The condition of veld and livestock in most summer rainfall areas is generally good. Major dam levels have increased in the provinces except in the Western Cape and Eastern Cape, and water restrictions remain in place in several provinces.

According to the seasonal forecast issued by the South African Weather Service dated 29 September 2017, the forecasting system is currently uncertain of the specific direction of rainfall during late spring. During early- to mid-summer, rainfall is expected to be above normal. Warmer than normal temperatures are expected during late spring. However, that is expected to change, becoming cooler towards early- to mid-summer. With the seasonal forecast in mind and the current conditions, farmers are advised to continue to conserve water and other resources in accordance with the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act, 1983 (Act No. 43 of 1983).

Food security at risk

The September 2017 food security update issued by the Famine Early Warning System Network (FEWS-NET) indicates that most households in the Southern African region continue to experience minimal food insecurity due to the above-average harvest in 2017. Minimal (IPC Phase 1) outcomes are expected to continue through January 2018 in most surplus-producing areas in the region, while deficit production areas are expected to experience Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes starting in October.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is currently the only country in the region with areas currently in Crisis (IPC Phase 3), mainly due to conflict. In some parts of Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, poor households will be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in January 2018, which coincides with the peak lean season period.

FEWS-NET further states that many poor households across the region are consuming own-produced crops and supplementing these foods with market purchases. In most countries, stable maize grain prices have helped to improve access. Households can meet their livelihood protection needs by earning incomes from gardening, as well as other off-season activities like brick-moulding and grass sales. Winter cropping is another key activity that is helping to boost incomes for poor households.

Maize grain prices remain below average in most surplus-producing areas in the region, especially in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique. For both Malawi and Mozambique, prices were 10% and 9% below the five-year average, respectively. This trend is typical and is generally caused by the decline in demand for market purchases as most households continue to consume their own-produced crops.

Field reports in Zimbabwe indicate that market demand for maize is gradually increasing as own-produced stocks for some households become limited, which will probably result in price increases from September onwards. Additionally, monitored markets in southern Madagascar show increases in maize grain prices because of poor production this past season. [The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a set of standardised tools that aim to provide a “common currency” for classifying the severity and magnitude of food insecurity].

Advice to farmers

Dryland summer crop farmers are advised to wait for sufficient moisture before planting, stay within the normal planting window and consider relevant cultivars in line with the forecast. Irrigation farmers should plant in line with water restrictions/availability in their areas. Farmers should follow the weather and climate forecast regularly so as to make informed decisions.

Livestock farmers are advised to keep precautionary measures in place. These include the provision of additional feed such as relevant licks, maintenance of livestock in accordance with available grazing, provision of enough water points on the farm where possible, as well as shelter during bad weather conditions.

The risk remains high for conditions conducive for veld fires as the veld is dry in areas with sufficient biomass, and veld fires have been reported in several provinces. Farmers are encouraged to maintain firebreaks and adhere to veld fire warnings. Episodes of localised flooding resulting from thunderstorms are likely and preventative measures should be in place. Heat waves are also likely to occur during spring and summer and therefore measures to combat these should be in place.

Farmers are encouraged to implement measures to combat issues provided in the early warning information.

These measures include:

- Using grey water where possible
- Harvesting water during rainy days

- Scheduling irrigation plans in accordance with water restrictions and irrigating in the early morning or late afternoon
- Proper veld management practices to preserve agricultural resources.

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