

Zimbabwe bans corn imports after bumper crop: media

HARARE, Zimbabwe - Zimbabwe has banned the import of corn after enjoying a bumper crop that authorities hope will be enough to feed the nation and stimulate home-grown production, state-owned media reported on Tuesday.



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Zimbabwe was once known as the "breadbasket" of Africa for its fertile land and modern farming practices. But a programme of seizing farms from white owners beginning in 2000 seriously damaged productivity, causing the country to become heavily dependent on food imports.

"Government stopped issuing grain import permits about four months ago and no maize imports are allowed at our borders," Davis Marapira, the deputy agriculture minister, told the state-controlled Herald newspaper.

The paper said Zimbabwe is expecting to produce two million tonnes of corn in 2017 - enough to meet domestic demand. The southern African country has set aside \$200 million (180 million euros) from the Treasury and private coffers to purchase the crop from farmers at the increased price of \$390 per tonne in a bid to encourage domestic production, the paper added.

The Herald raised fears that corn from Zimbabwe's neighbours sold closer to the market rate - around \$160 per tonne - could be smuggled in illicitly by criminals to cash-in on the agricultural stimulus.

Last year the country declared a state of disaster after a regional drought caused by the El Niño weather phenomenon ravaged crops, left tens of thousands of cattle dead and reservoirs dry.

Source: AFP

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