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AND AGRICULTURE**SPECIAL ALERT****No. 320**

(Circulated only for countries where foodcrops or supply situation conditions give rise to concern)

**COUNTRY: SOUTHERN AFRICA****DATE: 19 February 2002**

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**NEARLY 4 MILLION PEOPLE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA FACE SEVERE  
FOOD SHORTAGES**

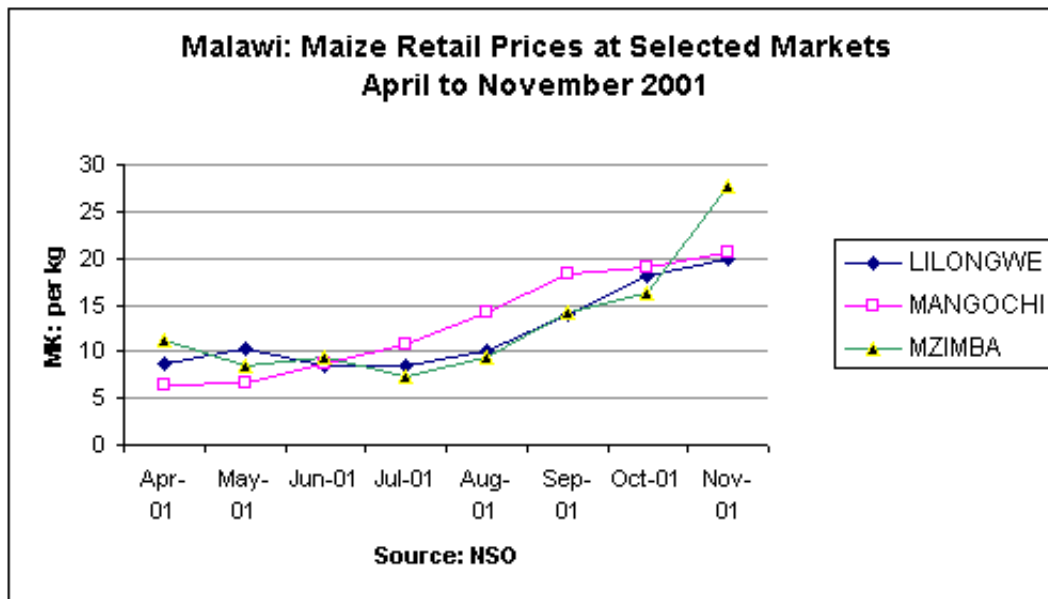
The food supply situation in Southern Africa is tight as a result of a sharply reduced 2001 cereal harvest, caused by adverse weather and reduced planting in parts. Aggregate output of maize, the main staple in the sub-region, is estimated at 13.4 million tonnes, one-quarter lower than in the year 2000 and well below the average of the past five years. Prices of maize have increased several fold in the past months, undermining access to food for large sections of the population in several countries. Serious food shortages have emerged in rural and urban areas of **Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe** where maize stocks are at extremely low levels, reflecting the production shortfall and difficulties in timely imports of the commodity. Emergency food assistance is urgently required until the next main harvest from mid-April 2002 for over 2 million people in these countries. WFP has started distributions of food aid but more pledges are required to avoid interruptions in the emergency operations. There is also an urgent need for concerted effort to expedite delivery of commercially imported maize from South Africa to prevent further deterioration of the food supply situation. Elsewhere in the sub-region, emergency food aid is being distributed to 172 000 people in southern Mozambique where the harvest was reduced for the second consecutive year. In Swaziland, households affected by drought in the Middle and Lowerveld provinces face food shortages. The Government has started distribution of emergency food relief to the most needy. In Lesotho and Namibia, the food supply situation is tight as a result of poor cereal harvests and commercial imports falling short of requirements. Vulnerable groups in urban and rural areas are experiencing food difficulties. In Angola, emergency food aid is needed for over 1.3 million internally displaced people whose numbers continue to swell as a result of surges in the long-running civil war.

In **Malawi**, the 2001 maize harvest declined by one-third from the good level of the previous year due to excessive rains and floods, coupled with reduced and late delivery of inputs. In southern areas, nearly 650 000 people were seriously affected by floods and suffered crop losses. The national maize import requirement for 2001/02 (April/March) has been estimated at 200 000 tonnes, compared to an exportable surplus in 2000/01. Despite bumper harvests in 1999 and 2000, the strategic grain reserve held by the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) was at a very low level at the beginning of the current marketing year (2001/02 April/March). The estimated import requirement is the minimum to cover consumption needs and does not include provision for the replenishment of the strategic reserve. Commercial imports of maize were forecast at 180 000 tonnes, including informal cross-border imports from Mozambique and Tanzania, conservatively projected at 25 000 tonnes. Emergency food aid is thus estimated at 20 000 tonnes. WFP has already distributed 9 000 tonnes in flood affected areas.

The Government, through NFRA, placed orders last October for 150 000 tonnes of maize from South Africa to be sold to private traders and the Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation (ADMARC) stores throughout the country<sup>1</sup>.

However, by late January only 60 000 tonnes had entered the country, reflecting transport bottlenecks in the sub-region due to competing demands from various countries for the transportation of imported fertilizers and maize. Delays are expected to worsen in the coming weeks following floods in early February that have interrupted transport on the Nacala railway in Mozambique.

By September last year, prices of maize were more than double their level at the beginning of the marketing year in April (see graph below). ADMARC prices, quoted at 5 Kwacha/kilo in July, reached 17 Kwacha/kilo in August. This reflected the depletion of domestic supplies, an increase of South African maize prices and the depreciation of the Malawi Kwacha. In areas closer to the Tanzania and Mozambique borders, prices have been lower, reflecting substantial cross-border inflows of maize. By November, prices had reached nearly 29 Kwacha/kilo in some locations. Reacting to further price increases in recent weeks, the Government has banned private traders from buying maize from NFRA, and ADMARC is now the only agency selling imported maize. The high maize prices have severely curtailed access to food for large sections of the country's population. These include rural households which suffered reduced harvests and urban households whose purchasing power has been seriously eroded.



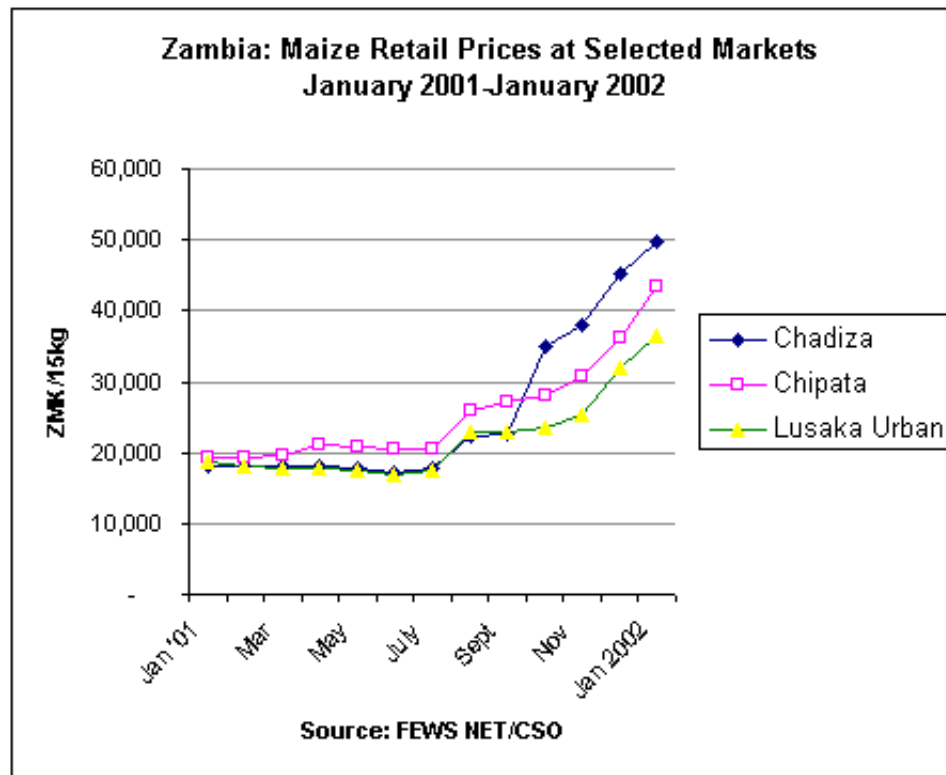
In some areas, other foods such as cassava and sweet potatoes are partially compensating for the shortage/high prices of maize, but in others vulnerable people are experiencing serious food difficulties. An indicator of these difficulties has been the daily long queues of the public at maize mills to buy maize husks. The selling of assets and household items is also widely reported. Recently, more than 20 000 households (or approximately 120 000 people) were seriously affected by floods in 11 of the country's 27 districts. The Government recently issued an urgent appeal for food assistance to avert famine in the country.

In **Zambia**, the 2001 maize harvest was officially estimated at 802 000 tonnes, a decrease of 24 percent from the previous year's level. The crop was adversely affected by excessive rains that resulted in localized floods in many areas, while in the south, prolonged dry weather negatively affected yields. Output of the minor wheat crop, harvested last November, was also low due to a decrease in sown area. Responding to the sharply reduced maize harvest, the Government in mid-July appealed to the international community for food assistance for some 2 million people in 42 districts that had been declared to be in a state of emergency. The Government has distributed 5 000 tonnes of maize from its own resources so far.

The maize import requirement in marketing year 2001/02 (May/April) was estimated by FAO at 400 000 tonnes, of which 350 000 tonnes were expected to be imported commercially and 50 000 tonnes to be covered by food aid. In October 2001 the Government, through the Food Reserve Agency (FRA), awarded tenders for the importation of 150 000 tonnes of maize from November 2001 to March 2002, which would be sold to 19 selected millers at subsidized prices. At the time the tenders were awarded, prices of South Africa maize landed in Zambia were in the range of US \$210-247 per tonne and millers offered US \$150-170 per tonne, with the Government paying the difference. However, by mid-January only 26 000 tonnes of maize had arrived in the country, reflecting, as in Malawi, transport constraints, with a backlog of freight awaiting despatch in South Africa, and the depreciation of the Zambian Kwacha.

Prices of maize, which started to rise in early July when normally they should have been declining, had on average risen by more than 100 percent by January 2002 (see graph below), reflecting the slow pace of imports. In some rural areas increases have been in the order of 200 percent. The highest rises have been registered in eastern parts of the

country. In Chadiza in Eastern Province, maize meal was selling at 50 000 Kwacha per 25 kg bag in late January, compared to around 20 000 Kwacha five months earlier.



The low volumes of maize reaching the market have resulted in several mills stopping production. Shortages of maize meal in rural and urban markets have led to long queues at stores in Lusaka and other cities. There are also reports of increasing cross border movement of people to neighbouring Malawi and Mozambique in search of work for food. In some of the worst affected districts where cassava is an important food staple, it is partially substituting for maize. In other areas coping mechanisms such as consumption of wild foods are reported. WFP plans to distribute 42 000 tonnes of maize as emergency food aid for 1.3 million worst affected people in 23 districts for four months until the next harvest. In November, it launched an appeal for US\$18.9 million to fund the emergency operation, but by early February pledges fell far short of requirements.

In **Zimbabwe**, the 2001 maize crop was estimated at 1.5 million tonnes, 28 percent below the previous year and well below average. The decrease was mainly due to a reduction of 54 percent in the area planted on the large-scale commercial farms, as a result of disruption by land acquisition activities. In the communal areas, plantings were affected by payment delays from the Grain Marketing Board (GMB), while yields were reduced by a mid-season dry spell followed by excessive rains, particularly in southern areas.

Government response to the food deficit has been the restoration of the monopoly of GMB in all trade in maize. In December, it also introduced legislation allowing the seizure of all maize in the commercial sector that had not been declared within two weeks after harvest. In addition, the Government has been trying to import through the GMB some 150 000-200 000 tonnes of maize from neighbouring South Africa. However, due to the country's severe shortage of foreign exchange, only 60 000 tonnes had been imported by early February and relatively small quantities have entered the country since then. It appears unlikely that all the planned maize imports could arrive in Zimbabwe in the next

two months when harvesting of the current maize crop begins.

Official maize stocks that at the beginning of the marketing year in May 2001 stood at 390 000 tonnes, were by the first week of February estimated at 10 000 tones, less than a week of consumption.

Prices of basic food staples, which had increased by more than 300 percent from June to August 2001, stabilized or declined in October when the Government ordered price cuts of 5 to 20 percent for maize meal, bread, meat, vegetables, milk, cooking oil and salt. However, these items have virtually disappeared from the open market to the parallel market at higher prices.

Severe food shortages are reported in southern, eastern and extreme northern parts of the country where the harvest was reduced by dry weather or excessive rains. Maize meal and other food staples are scarce in rural and urban markets, where long queues at stores are reported. The situation is particularly serious in the drought-prone Matabeleland South Province. The Government has appealed for international food assistance and WFP has requested from donors US\$60 million to purchase 94 000 tonnes of cereals to assist 558 000 rural and urban people facing acute food shortages. However, no pledges had been received until the end of January 2002.

The food situation could deteriorate further in the second half of the year, as the 2002 maize crop, already down in plantings for the second consecutive year, has been affected by a prolonged dry spell since late December, particularly in southern areas. If rains are not received soon, maize production could fall below the level of last year. Food security is also being affected by the general economic crisis prevailing in Zimbabwe. Scarcity of foreign exchange and the resulting shortages of petrol, erratic power supply and inadequate supplies of raw materials, are seriously disrupting all economic activities.

*This report is prepared on the responsibility of the FAO Secretariat with information from official and unofficial sources. Since conditions may change rapidly, please contact Office of the Chief, ESCG, FAO, (Telex 610181 FAO I; Fax: 0039-06-5705-4495, E-Mail (INTERNET): [GIEWS1@FAO.ORG](mailto:GIEWS1@FAO.ORG) ,for further information if required.*

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1 / Despite the considerable increase in the number of private traders since market liberalization, they do not yet have the commercial expertise needed for formal international trade and the required financial capacity.