



GlEWS Country Brief Malawi

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FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT

- Planting of 2018 cereal crops underway
- Cereal production in 2017 rebounded strongly, mostly resulting from beneficial weather conditions
- Maize prices well below year-earlier levels, reflecting favourable supply situation
- Food security situation improved significantly, with food insecure numbers falling by 87 percent on yearly basis

Planting of 2018 crops underway

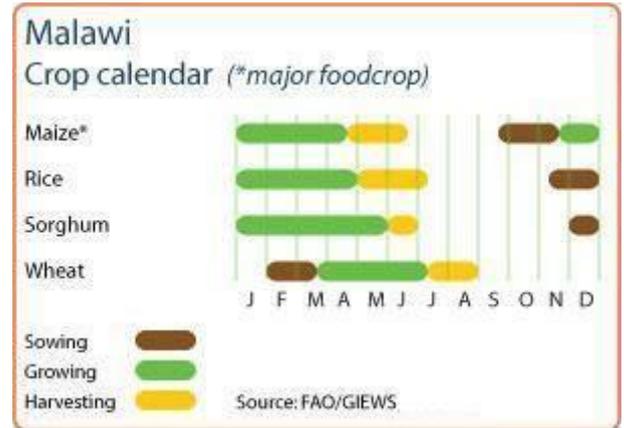
Land preparation for, and planting of, the 2018 cereal crops is underway, with light rains recorded in localized parts of Central and Southern regions in October. Weather forecasts point to a slightly higher probability of below-normal rains until early next year; however, this does not directly imply insufficient rainfall for normal crop development, as average rainfall volumes for the season are higher than the water requirements for the maize crop. The Government will continue with the implementation of the Farm Input Subsidy Programme (FISP) in the 2017/18 cropping season, with the objective to improve farmers' access to agricultural inputs. As part of the FISP, the Government has raised the value of maize seed vouchers to MWK 6 000, up from MWK 3 000 in 2016, in efforts to further augment access to improved seed varieties.

Cereal production increased to an above-average level in 2017

The 2017 maize output is officially estimated at approximately 3.5 million tonnes, 46 percent up on a yearly basis compared to the drought-reduced 2016 output and 6 percent higher compared to the previous five-year average. Production gains are also estimated for millet, rice and sorghum, contributing to an overall above-average cereal output of 3.7 million tonnes in 2017.

The increase is mainly reflective of beneficial weather conditions, despite poor rains at the start of the season and generally good availability of inputs. However, weather shocks (dry spells) and Fall Armyworm infestations have caused some localized damage.

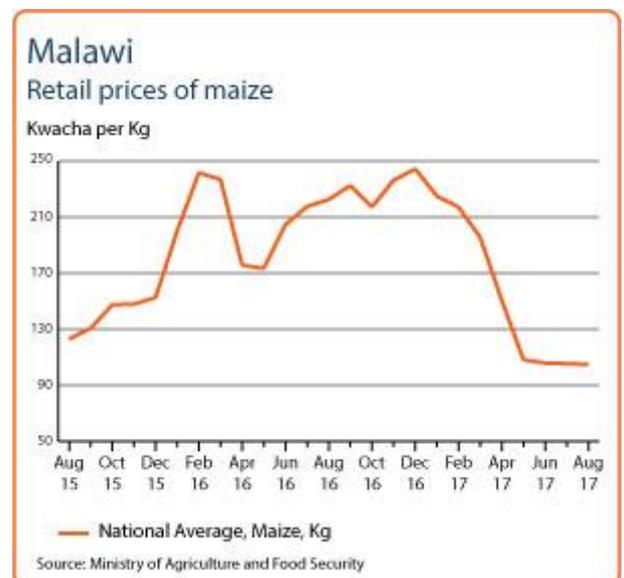
Regarding cash crops, cotton production is estimated to have declined by 6 percent to about 30 000 tonnes, reflecting a decrease in plantings as farmers switched to alternative crops. Similarly, tobacco production is estimated to be down compared to the previous year.



Malawi Cereal production

	2012-2016 average	2016	2017 estimate	change 2017/2016
	000 tonnes			percent
Maize	3 278	2 369	3 464	46
Rice (paddy)	113	87	121	39
Sorghum	75	50	90	80
Others	35	21	36	71
Total	3 501	2 528	3 711	47

Note: percentage change calculated from unrounded data.
Source: FAO/GIEWS Country Cereal Balance Sheets



Import requirements fall on account of larger domestic output

As a result of the larger domestic output in 2017, imports of maize are expected at only minimal levels in the 2017/18 marketing year (April/March). In the previous marketing year, to compensate for both the reduced 2016 output (34 percent below the five-year average) and the significantly depleted stocks (household and public reserves), maize imports were estimated at about 350 000 tonnes, compared to an average figure of 45 000 tonnes.

In late October 2017, reflecting the larger output and improved supply situation, the Government lifted the two-year ban on maize exports, which was implemented in an effort to stem the impact of tight domestic supplies following a dry weather-affected production in 2016.

Rice imports are also forecast to fall slightly, as the increase in paddy production will satisfy a larger proportion of the domestic consumption needs.

Maize prices decline steeply to below year-earlier levels

The favourable supply situation triggered a steep decline in maize prices between March and May 2017, pushing prices well below their year earlier levels. As of August 2017, the national average maize price, at MWK 105 per kg, was 53 percent down on a yearly basis. The Agricultural Development Corporation (ADMARC), a Government parastatal, is selling maize at MWK 250, more than double the national average retail price.

The fall in maize prices and other food items were the main drivers behind a sharp slowdown in the national inflation rate. In August 2017, the annual rate was estimated at 9 percent, falling into single digits for the first time since 2011.

Food security conditions improved significantly in 2017/18

Food security conditions improved significantly this year on account of the increased cereal output and lower cereal prices that improved food access. However, the reduced cash crop production is likely to have constrained income opportunities for some farming households, curbing the positive impacts of lower food prices. Below-average 2017 cereal harvests in some southern districts are expected to stress food security conditions as households' food stocks have been exhausted earlier than usual.

Overall, according to the results from the 2017 Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee's (MVACs) evaluation, about 835 000 people are estimated to be food insecure in 2017/18, compared to 6.7 million who required food assistance in 2016/17.

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