



GIEWS Country Brief

The Kingdom of Eswatini

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FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT

- Harvesting of 2020 cereal crops underway and production anticipated at average level
- Maize import requirements in 2019/20 (May/April) estimated at high level, following low 2019 harvest
- Prices of maize meal stable or decreased in early 2020, but remained high on yearly basis
- Large number of people in need of food assistance in early 2020

Harvesting of 2020 cereals crops underway

Harvesting of the 2020 cereal crops, mostly maize, started in early April and is expected to conclude in June.

Low rainfall amounts early in the season are reported to have caused a contraction in the area planted to cereal crops, while a limited availability of tractor services during the planting period, used by many farmers to prepare fields, delayed plantings. Rains from November 2019 to March 2020 improved and were generally beneficial for cereal crops. However, below-average rainfall totals were estimated in northern Hhohho and southern Shiselweni regions, which are likely to curb crop productivity in these areas.

As of late March, remote sensing vegetation indices indicated mostly favourable crop conditions across the country, raising expectations that average to above-average maize yields could be attained, which would partly offset the effects of a reduced sown area. Overall, cereal production in 2020 is forecast, therefore, at a near-average level, but lower than the previous year.

Increased cereal import requirements in 2019/20

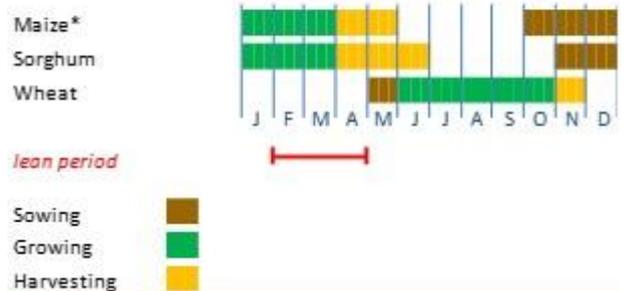
The 2019 cereal output was estimated at 96 000 tonnes, 10 percent above the five-year average, but 16 percent below the previous year's high level due to localized erratic rainfall in some areas of eastern Lubombo and southern Shiselweni regions.

Reflecting a decrease in production and a large domestic cereal deficit, import requirements in the 2019/20 marketing year (May/April) are forecast at 230 000 tonnes, more than 20 percent above the five-year average. Maize imports are forecast at about 140 000 tonnes, almost entirely sourced from neighbouring South Africa. Imports of rice and wheat are expected at near-average

Eswatini

Crop Calendar

(*major foodcrop)



Source: FAO/GIEWS.

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Cereal Production

	2014-2018 average	2018	2019 estimate	change 2019/2018
	000 tonnes			percent
Maize	86	113	95	-16.4
Rice (paddy)	1	1	1	-25.0
Sorghum	1	1	1	40.0
Total	87	115	96	-16.2

Note: percentage change calculated from unrounded data.

Source: FAO/GIEWS Country Cereal Balance Sheet.

levels, forecast to reach about 40 000 tonnes and 50 000 tonnes, respectively.

Prices of maize meal stable or decreased in early 2020, but remained high on yearly basis

Prices of maize meal, the country's main staple, remained unchanged or declined slightly in the first two months of 2020, following mostly stable levels during the last semester of 2019. As of February 2020, prices of maize meal were on average 7 percent higher than their year-earlier values, mainly reflecting the high prices in South Africa, the country's main supplier of cereals.

Heightened food insecurity in first quarter of 2020

According to the latest report of the Vulnerability Assessment Committee (VAC), in 2019, an estimated 232 000 people, about 25 percent of the rural population, were estimated to be food insecure and in need of humanitarian assistance during the October 2019-March 2020 period. This figure is almost double the level compared to the previous year, when an estimated 122 000 people faced acute food insecurity. Most of the food insecure population in 2019/20 was concentrated in eastern Lubombo and southern Shiselweni regions, where cereal production shortfalls occurred in 2019.

Looking further ahead, despite an expected average harvest in 2020 that would stabilize food security conditions in the next months, the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic could cause an increase in the prevalence of malnutrition. The effects of the pandemic are expected to be primarily channeled through a reduction in economic activities and associated income losses, while potential breakdowns in food supply chains is an additional concern for food security across the country. A recent analysis by the Government and humanitarian partners indicated that almost 300 000 people are at risk of acute food security due to the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 and measures adopted by the Government

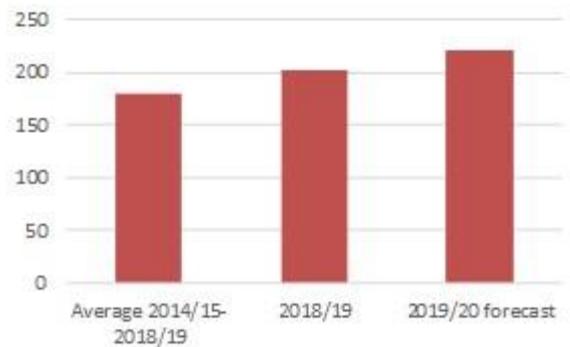
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government introduced a partial lockdown from 27 March 2020 until the first week of May. The quarantine measures allow essential economic activities to continue, including the production of food, while agricultural workers are exempt from the travel restrictions. In addition, international borders remain open for trade in food and other essential products.

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Cereals Imports

000 tonnes



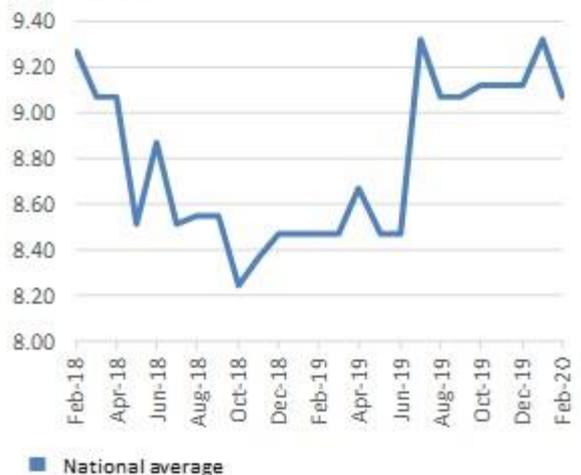
Note: Includes rice in milled terms. Split year refers to individual crop marketing years (for rice, calendar year of second year shown).

Source: FAO/GIEWS Country Cereal Balance Sheets.

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Retail prices of maize meal

Lilangeni per kg



Source: FAO/GIEWS Food Price Monitoring and Analysis Tool.