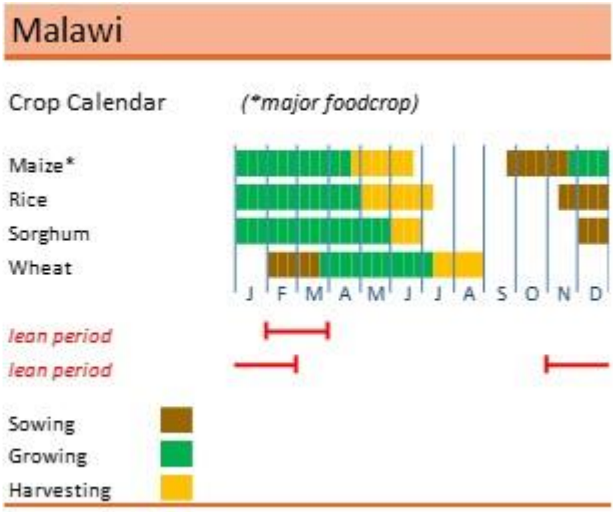
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GIEWS Country Brief
Malawi

Reference Date: 20-September-2019

FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT

- **Cereal production rises to above-average level in 2019**
- **Boosted by larger harvest, supply outlook improved in 2019/20 marketing year (April/March)**
- **Recent uptick in maize grain prices reinforces higher year-on-year levels**
- **Despite improvements in food security, over 1 million people still require assistance for food due to localized production shortfalls**



Source: FAO/GIEWS, FEWSNET.

Favourable weather instigates rebound in maize production

Maize production, which accounts for the bulk of the country's aggregate cereal output, is estimated at about 3.4 million tonnes in 2019, marking a rebound from the reduced output of 2018. At this level, the maize harvest is 10 percent above the average of the previous five years. The favourable outturn was mostly the result of conducive weather conditions in central and northern districts. However, in the Southern Region, which produces about one-third of the national maize harvest, heavy rains in early March resulted in flooding, causing the loss of standing crops.

Outputs of the other cereal crops are also estimated at above-average levels as favourable weather conditions boosted the area harvested and yields. Overall, cereal production in 2019 is estimated at 3.7 million tonnes, 12 percent above the average.

Planting of the 2020 crops, that are to be harvested next March, will begin in October. Seasonal weather forecasts point to an overall higher likelihood of average precipitation throughout the country for most of the cropping season (October-June), which indicates an increased likelihood of a second consecutive above-average cereal output in 2020.

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Cereal Production

	2014-2018 average	2018	2019 estimate	change 2019/2018
	000 tonnes			percent
Maize	3 076	2 792	3 392	21.5
Rice (paddy)	112	114	134	18.0
Sorghum	80	86	137	59.4
Others	34	35	46	31.2
Total	3 302	3 026	3 709	22.6

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

Boost in cereal supplies in 2019/20

The larger maize output has boosted the supply outlook for the 2019/20 marketing year (April/March), with a moderate build-up in stocks for both households and national strategic reserves expected. At the same time, import requirements are foreseen at below-average levels. Overall, maize supplies are forecast at an average level in 2019/20, in contrast to the below-average availabilities of the previous year.

Uptick in maize grain prices in recent months

Nominal prices of maize grain rose steeply in July and firmed up in August 2019, having generally risen since mid-2018. As a result, the national average maize price, at MWK 217 per kg, was about 80 percent higher year on year as of August. The elevated levels were mostly driven by the effects of a tight supply situation in the previous year. Despite a larger output in 2019, seasonal price declines were tempered by a combination of an increase in the farm gate price to MWK 180 per kg (up from MWK 150), heightened export demand from neighbouring countries reflecting the poor harvests and expectations of an increase in institutional purchases in 2019.

Improved harvest lessens food assistance needs

Prompted by the production upturn, the number of food insecure people is estimated to have fallen on a yearly basis from 2.2 million to 0.67 million in the July-September 2019 period. Food insecurity is, however, expected to worsen in the next months, particularly for rural households in the south that were affected by floods. Consequently, the number of people in need of assistance is projected to increase to 1.06 million between October 2019 and March 2020, according to the latest IPC analysis. These projections were based on the assumption that maize prices would remain below MWK 250 per kg. However, given the current levels and the historical seasonal trends, prices could surpass this threshold before the harvest period in March 2020 and, consequently, result in an aggravation of food insecurity conditions.

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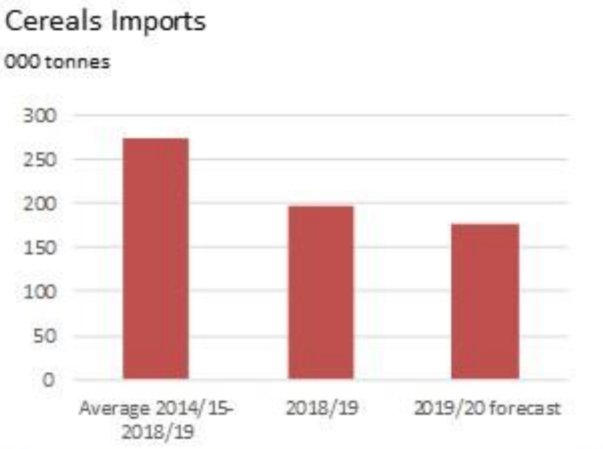

Note: Includes rice in milled terms. Split year refers to individual crop marketing years (for rice, calendar year of second year shown).
Source: FAO/GIEWS Country Cereal Balance Sheets.