GIEWS Country Brief
Zimbabwe

Reference Date: 18-January-2022

FOOD SECURITY SNAPSHOT
• Uncertain prospects for 2022 cereal crops following mixed start to cropping season
• Cereal production rebounded strongly in 2021 after two years of weather-reduced harvests
• Reflecting large domestic supplies, cereal imports forecast to fall steeply in 2021/22 marketing year
• Food price increases picked up at end of 2021, but remained lower than high rates in 2020
• Food security conditions improve, but access constraints remain a concern

Uncertain outlook for 2022 cereal crops
Sowing of the 2022 cereal crops is nearly complete. Conditions for planting and crop emergence have been mostly favourable, reflecting near-average rainfall amounts across the country in November and early December 2021. A reduction in rainfall in the second half of December in northern parts of the country, where the bulk of the national maize crop is produced, combined with abnormally high temperatures, is likely to have been detrimental to crop growth. Although remote sensing data depicted slightly poorer-than-average vegetation conditions in northwestern areas, reflecting the reduced rains, vegetation health was generally near average in early January 2022 in most provinces of the country.

Looking further ahead, weather forecasts for February and March 2022 point to a higher-than-normal probability of reduced rainfall amounts. These months are generally a critical period for the development of cereal grains and water stress can cause large yield reductions.

The 2022 maize production is forecast at an above-average level, but substantially below the exceptional output of 2021.

Substantial cereal harvest in 2021
Total cereal production in 2021 is estimated at 3.4 million tonnes, nearly 2 million tonnes above the five-year average.

Production of maize, the principal food crop, is estimated at 2.7 million tonnes, more than double the five-year average. The large outturn reflects an expansion in the sown area, estimated at a well above-average level of 1.9 million hectares, and high yields. The upturn in crop productivity results from almost ideal weather conditions throughout the season and widespread distribution of subsidized agricultural inputs, mostly fertilizers,
through government programmes, including the Presidential Input Scheme that targeted about 1.8 million smallholder farmers.

Outturns of other cereal crops, including sorghum and millet, are also estimated at high levels in 2021, exceeding the five-year averages. Production of wheat, which was harvested during the last quarter of 2021, is estimated at a well above-average level of over 300 000 tonnes.

**Cereal import needs expected to fall in 2021/22**

On account of the large domestic output, cereal import requirements in the 2021/22 marketing year (April/March) have been cut significantly. Total cereal imports, which would now almost entirely comprise of rice and wheat, with very limited quantities of maize in contrast to previous years, are forecast to be lower than 200 000 tonnes, well below the five-year average. In addition, national stocks are forecast to be built up to an above-average level, inferring a comfortable domestic supply situation.

**Uptick in food price increases**

The official monthly food inflation rate was estimated at 6.2 percent in December 2021, an upturn compared to rates in mid-2021 when it was as low as 1 percent in May. The increase towards the end of 2021 was largely underpinned by a period of currency weakness, particularly in the parallel market, which supported a steeper rise in prices of goods bought with Zimbabwe dollars, while prices in US dollar terms were reportedly more stable. The increase in the pump price for diesel and petrol last October was also a contributory factor. Despite the moderate rise in food price increases in the last two quarters of 2021, when compared with inflation rates in 2020, food prices were much more stable owing to the large domestic 2021 cereal harvest and an overall more stable exchange rate.

**Overall improved food security situation in early 2022**

In the previous lean season between January and March 2021, the IPC acute food security analysis estimated that about 3.4 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance. Although for the current lean period in 2022 IPC estimates are not yet available, the number of people in need of support is expected to be lower, reflecting the substantial upturn in domestic production and, therefore, an increase in households’ food supplies. This situation is mirrored in a reduction in government and humanitarian food assistance. For example, the government has reduced the size of food rations distributed to vulnerable households from 50 to 10 kg of cereal per person.

The most vulnerable households, however, still face high levels of food insecurity, particularly related to economic access to food. This is due to the continued increase in food prices and reductions in incomes stemming from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although overall economic growth is expected to pick up, households’ incomes are not foreseen to recover significantly in 2022.

**Disclaimer:** The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of FAO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.