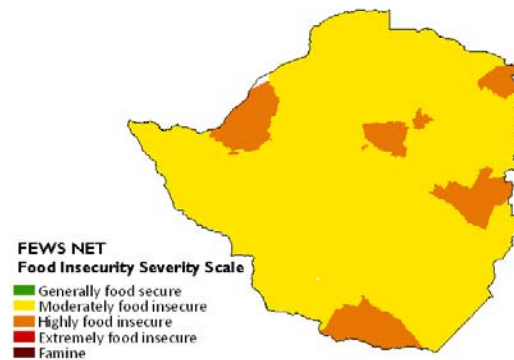


## ZIMBABWE Food Security Update

February 2009

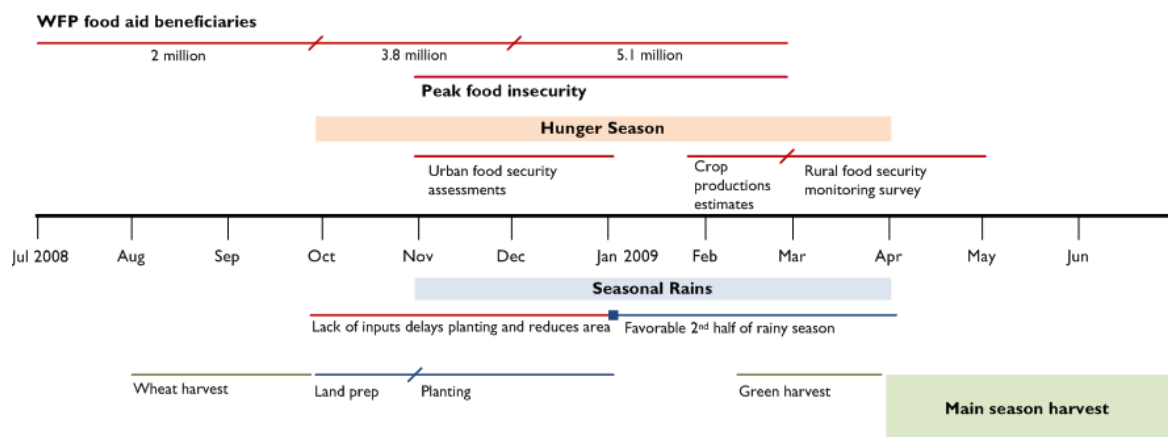
- The food security situation in Zimbabwe has improved since January 2009, and more food is available on the market. Commercial and humanitarian agencies have managed to import close to 750,000 MT of cereal, which is about 64 percent of their pledges. In addition, private traders and individuals have continued importing food following the suspension of restrictions on food imports. Increased competition on the domestic market has resulted in a drop in the prices of some basic food stuffs.
- In February 2009, food access for civil servants, who constitute the largest proportion of the formally employed labor force, was boosted when they began to receive an allowance in foreign currency. Other sectors are expected to follow suit.
- Humanitarian agencies have continued supporting an increasing number of beneficiaries in the rural areas. Beneficiary figures have increased from around 5 million in December and close to 6 million in January 2009. In February 2009 humanitarian agencies plan to assist close to 7 million people. However, there has been a significant drop in the ration sizes, with monthly rations of maize grain dropping from 10 kg per person to 5 kg, due to resource shortfalls.
- The recent ZimVAC urban assessment carried out in January 2009 has confirmed a continued deterioration of the food security situation in urban areas throughout the country compared to 2006. The assessment found 33 percent of the assessed households to be food insecure, compared to 24 percent in November 2006.
- The agricultural season started about 20-30 days late, and most parts of the country did not receive adequate planting rains until mid-December. Besides the late start of the season, area planted was affected by shortages of inputs, including seeds and fertilizers. Area planted to maize this season is estimated at about 1.50 million hectares, a drop of 14 percent from last season's area, which was estimated to be 1.75 million ha. The area planted to sorghum and millets increased by 24 and 11 percent, respectively, from last season.

**Figure 1.** Current estimated food security conditions, January - March 2009



See [www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale](http://www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale) for more information on the FEWS NET food insecurity severity scale. Source: FEWS NET

### Seasonal calendar and critical events timeline



Source: FEWS NET

## Current food security conditions

### National Cereal Availability

Cereal imports by commercial and humanitarian agencies continue to contribute to the country's food security. As of mid February 2009, they had managed to import close to 750,000 MT, which is 64 percent of their pledges, leaving the national cereal gap at 233,000 MT (table 1). It is important to note however that estimates of cereal imports by private traders and individuals are not available or factored into the Cereal Balance Sheet, but these have also contributed to improvements in food security.

**Table 1.** National Cereal Balance Sheet as at 13 February 2009

	CFSAM Projection (MT)	As of 13 February 2009 (MT)
National Requirements	1,773,000	1,773,000
Opening Stock	19,000	32,000
Production	759,000	759,000
Government Imports	600,000	450,000
Food Aid Imports	380,000	299,000
Informal Cross Border Imports	23,000	
Cereal Surplus/Deficit	8,000	(233,000)

Source: GoZ, WFP, C-SAFE

Given the challenges faced by the agricultural sector this season, specifically the shortage of inputs, domestic production is likely to be poor, and food assistance needs are expected to resurface soon after the April June harvest.

### Cereal availability at sub national level

#### Rural areas

The food security situation in rural areas has remained relatively stable despite this being the peak of the hunger season, due to the contribution of food aid programs, complemented by the green harvest from the fields and the gardens. In February 2009, WFP and C SAFE planned to assist close to 7 million people, but with the anticipated resource shortfalls there is likely to be a reduction in monthly cereal ration sizes from 10 kg per person to 5 kg per person. However, the agencies plan to continue distribution of full cereal rations in some highly food insecure areas and could potentially increase vegetable oil rations in other areas in March 2009.

From the recent First Round Crop and Livestock assessment, 33 percent of maize crop this season was planted in November and by now it is ready for consumption as green mealies. Manicaland and Mashonaland Central had the least proportion of their maize crop planted early and their green mealies may be less prevalent. Wetlands areas, which constitute a small proportion of overall cropped area in parts of Masvingo and Midlands, have already harvested their maize crop.

#### Urban areas

The January 2009 Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) urban assessment revealed a continuous deterioration of food security in urban areas across the country since 2006. The assessment found 33 percent of the assessed households to be food insecure compared to 24 percent in November 2006. These food insecure households had the following common characteristics.

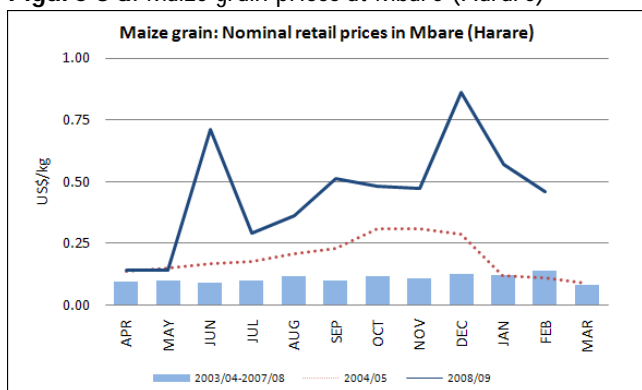
- Food insecure households tended to have more household members (5.5 people) than food secure households (4.7 people).
- Households with at least one orphan were more likely to be food insecure than those without orphans.
- Households with at least one member who was chronically ill were more likely to be food insecure than those without.
- Households that reported receiving remittances were more likely to be food secure than those that were not.
- Elderly headed households were more likely to be food insecure than those with younger heads of households.

From the assessment, it was noted that consumption patterns were deteriorating: most households were consuming one to two meals a day and dietary diversity was limited, with carbohydrates and vegetables constituting most of the meals. The assessment also showed that, compared to 2006, households have intensified the use of coping strategies, such as limiting the size of portions, relying on less preferred foods, and reducing the number of meals.

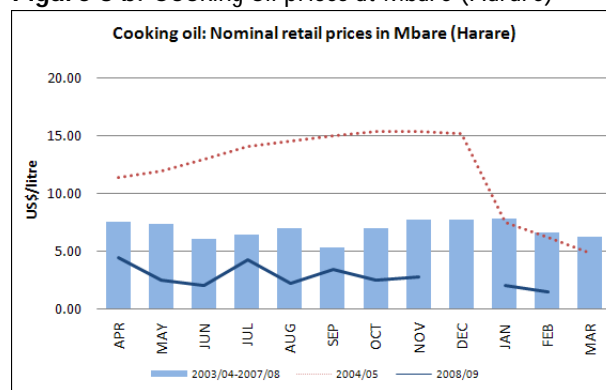
From the urban assessment it was noted that the magnitude of food insecurity in urban areas has grown and only an insignificant population was receiving food assistance. It is important that appropriate social protection programs be implemented in urban areas.

Through FEWS NET routine monitoring, it has been observed that with duties removed on basic food stuffs; availability of these commodities on the market has improved. Most goods are readily available and more competition is observed on the domestic market, resulting in a decline in prices. For most of the commodities monitored (which include maize grain, maize meal, sugar, cooking oil, and vegetables), prices have gone down by 40 to 60 percent between December 2008 and February 2009. Figures 3a and 3b present some of the commodities monitored. Though cooking oil prices have remained below the recent four year average, prices are still very high. Although a liter of cooking oil dropped from USD 2.78 to USD 1.50 between November 2008 and February 2009, these prices remain very high and unaffordable for majority of the urban poor households. However access problem for civil servants who constitute a large proportion of the formally employed labor force were addressed when they began to receive their allowances in foreign currency in February 2009.

**Figure 3 a. Maize grain prices at Mbare (Harare)**



**Figure 3 b. Cooking oil prices at Mbare (Harare)**



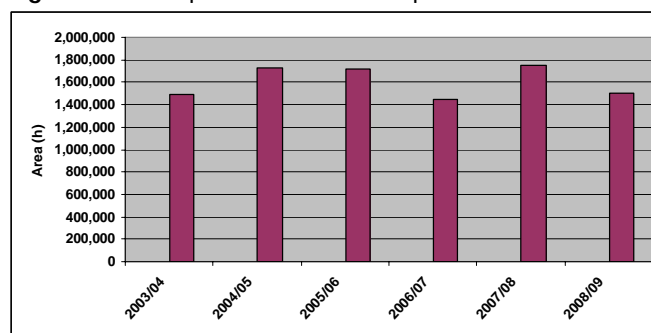
Source FEWS NET

**Summer season progress**

The agricultural season started about 20-30 days late, and most parts of the country only received adequate rains for planting by mid-December. Besides the late start of the season, area planted was affected by shortages of inputs, including seeds and fertilizers. Inputs support programs did not only provide inadequate quantities, their inputs packs were also not complete; in some areas, farmers received seed only and in other they received only fertilizers. These variations are likely to compromise yields. In areas that did not receive fertilizers, crops, mainly maize, are showing signs of nitrogen deficiency. It is important that top dressing fertilizers now be made available in these areas, particularly Manicaland Province, where young crops are most dominant and there is still time for fertilizer application. In the recent First Round Crop and Livestock Assessment, it was indicated that input quantities provided through the support programs were inadequate, some did not have complete input packages and the inputs were provided late. Some inputs were still being distributed in January 2009.

From the same assessment it was noted that overall area planted to crops declined since last year. Area planted to maize this season is estimated at about 1.50 million hectares, a drop of 14 percent from last season's area of 1.75 million ha (figure 4). The bulk of the maize crop (49 percent) was planted in December, 33 percent in November, and 18 percent in January. Much of the early planted maize crop is now ready for consumption as green mealies. Area planted to small grains increased this season compared to last season. Total area planted to sorghum and millets increased by 24 and 11 percent, respectively. Area planted to groundnuts also increased

**Figure 4. Area planted to maize crops, 2003/04 – 2008/09**



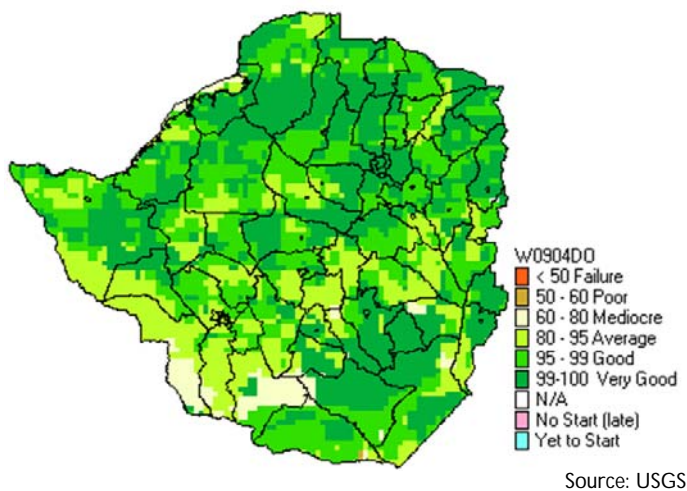
Source: CSO and Agritex

by 8 percent and this was mainly made possible by the use of retained seed. Since production of groundnuts was high last season, farmers could keep sufficient seed for this year’s crop, as is traditionally the case.

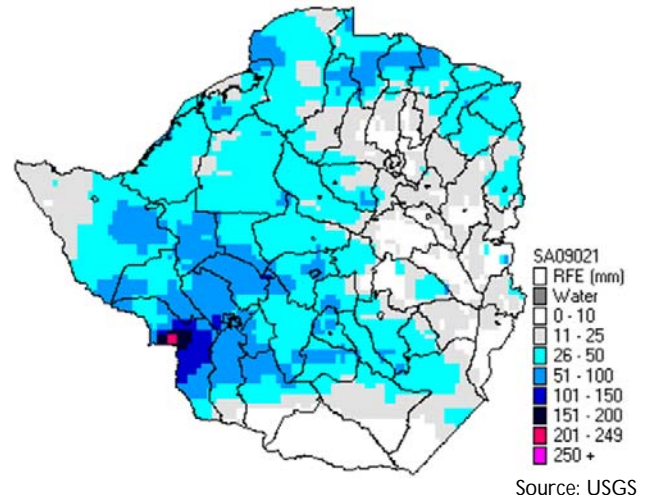
From the assessment it was noted that there was also a drop in area planted to cash crops, in particular cotton, which is a major source of income for smallholder farmers. Area planted to cotton this season is 316,656 ha, a 27 percent decrease from the 431,131 ha planted last year. This decrease in area planted was due to lack of input support, poor producer prices paid last season, and the cheque payment method, which resulted in farmers losing value of their crop in a hyperinflationary environment. It was noted that due to the poor availability of food crops over the last year, many farmers switched to cereal production this season.

The maize crop water requirement satisfaction index as of February dekad 1 indicates that crop conditions across the country are average to good (figure 5). However if the ensuing dryness (in grey color – figure 6), in the eastern and southern parts of the country is prolonged, this could impact on crop yields.

**Figure 5.** WRSI as of February dekad 1



**Figure 6.** Rainfall distribution Second Dekad of Feb 2009



Given the good rains received so far, the recent assessment indicated that livestock was in a fair to good body condition in communal areas, while in resettlement and commercial areas, where management practices are better, livestock conditions were very good. Water was available, though more rains are needed in order to boost the reserves for the dry period. Due to irregular dipping, tick borne disease was prevalent across the districts. It is recommended that proper and adequate dipping facilities be restored.

