

ZIMBABWE Food Security Alert

September 24, 2008

Slow cereal imports leave Zimbabwe facing major shortages

Zimbabwe's combined commercial and humanitarian cereal imports must triple from their current rate between now and March 2009 to meet the country's requirements for the remainder of the marketing year. At the current rate, Zimbabwe could run out of cereals by early November. The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) plans to purchase at least 600,000 MT of maize from South Africa, but had only imported 175,000 MT by the end of August. The flow of humanitarian food imports has increased following removal of the GoZ ban on non-governmental organization (NGO) operations. The NGO Consortium for the Southern Africa Food Security Emergency (C-SAFE), which represents a major food aid pipeline into the country, is sufficiently resourced to cover food aid operations in 17 districts through the hungry season. However, the World Food Programme (WFP), operating in 40 districts, faces resource shortfalls that could lead to a mid-season food aid pipeline break if contributions are not received immediately.

Table 1. Cereal balance sheet for the 2008/09 marketing year (in MT), current progress as of August 31, 2008

Requirements	1,773,000
Opening stocks	32,000
2007/08 production	759,000
GMB imports	175,000
Humanitarian imports	18,281
Deficit/surplus	(788,719)

Source: GoZ CFSAM, WFP, C-SAFE

Table 2. Current cereal availability and imports required to meet minimum annual consumption needs

Estimated cereal availability as of August 31	245,531 MT
Average weekly imports, April 1-August 31	8,786 MT
Consumption needs met beyond August 31 if imports progress remains the same	67 days
Required average weekly imports as of September 1 to meet domestic needs through March 31	26,290 MT

Source: FEWS NET Zimbabwe

Following the Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM) in April 2008, the GoZ, WFP, and C-SAFE planned to import approximately 1,164,000 MT of cereals to cover this year's production deficit and allow a surplus to carry over into the next marketing year, but as of August 31, combined imports had totaled only 193,281 MT (Table 1). To meet the country's estimated consumption needs for the remainder of the marketing year, excluding carryover, an estimated additional 788,719 MT of cereals are needed. The GoZ has imported cereals at only half of the monthly target rate, and the Grain Marketing Board (GMB) has been unable to distribute these cereals effectively due to fuel shortages, low rates offered for transport, poor communication among suppliers and transporters, and poor road conditions. Currently, the GoZ plans to import 600,000 MT of maize from South Africa.

WFP and C-SAFE fell behind their planned import schedules due to the ban on NGO activities that was only lifted at the end of August 2008. For this reason, critical food assistance interventions could not be programmed or implemented until recently, leaving millions without adequate access to food. C-SAFE has about 23,000 MT of food ready for immediate import from Durban and a total of 90,000 MT in their pipeline, some of which may be lent to WFP to offset their current shortfalls. Currently WFP faces commodity shortfalls of over 110,000 MT for the remainder of the marketing year, and expects a pipeline break for all commodities in January.

Given the current pace of imports, Zimbabwe could face a critical shortage or exhaustion of cereals as early as the first week of November (Table 2). An immediate and sustained increase in imports must occur to offset this scenario. The current in-country supply of agricultural inputs for the upcoming planting season is insufficient, and delays in delivery are likely. Late planting could aggravate the impact of forecast below-normal rainfall in the second half of the season (January-March 2009) in the country's main crop producing regions, increasing the potential for a poor harvest and the continued need for imports in 2009.