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Report Name: Zambia's Record Corn Production Reshapes Food Security Amid Election-Year Dynamics

Country: Zambia

Post: Pretoria

Report Category: Grain and Feed

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Report Highlights:

Zambia is set for a record corn harvest in marketing year 2026/27, driven by favorable La Niña rainfall, a more efficient rollout of the Farmer Input Support Program, and the long-term Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Program. The bumper crop has allowed the government to fully lift export bans, opening opportunities for exports to neighboring countries, though export competition from South Africa and a cautious food-security stance are pushing corn ending stocks to a record level. Ahead of the general elections, the Food Reserve Agency raised farmer purchase prices and ensured fast payments while keeping retail prices affordable for consumers. This surplus, paired with a broader economic recovery and easing inflation, marks a strong turnaround from the prior year's drought-driven shortages, even as Zambia maintains its strict ban on commercial genetically engineered corn cultivation.

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of production, supply, and distribution trends for corn in Zambia for marketing years (MY) 2026/27, 2025/26, and 2024/25.

Production: Zambia is projected to harvest a record 4.9 million metric tons (MMT) of corn in MY 2026/27, a 28 percent increase over the previous record set in MY 2025/26. This is a dramatic turnaround from the severe El Niño drought of MY 2024/25, which limited production to just 1.5 MMT.

Consumption: Total corn consumption is expected to rise to 3.1 MMT in MY 2026/27, with demand driven by lower prices, availability, and a recovery of hydropower generation that supports higher industrial activity, including corn processing.

Trade: With the government's full removal of export bans following the record harvest, Zambia's corn exports are projected to reach 500,000 MT in MY 2026/27, although competition from South Africa and stockpiling will limit exports below their full potential.

Stocks: Corn ending stocks are projected to reach a record 2.6 MMT in MY 2026/27, double the previous year's level, as the government deliberately retains higher-than-usual reserves due to this year's general election and concerns over a potential El Niño recurrence.

Corn

Table 1: Corn Production, Supply and Distribution

Corn Market Year Begins Zambia	2024/2025		2025/2026		2026/2027	
	May 2024		May 2025		May 2026	
	USDA Official	New Post	USDA Official	New Post	USDA Official	New Post
Area Harvested (1000 HA)	684	684	1691	1691	1700	1900
Beginning Stocks (1000 MT)	439	439	350	350	816	1293
Production (1000 MT)	1511	1511	3656	3865	3600	4937
MY Imports (1000 MT)	600	900	10	28	10	0
TY Imports (1000 MT)	500	800	10	25	10	0
Total Supply (1000 MT)	2550	2850	4016	4243	4426	6230
MY Exports (1000 MT)	0	0	400	150	400	500
TY Exports (1000 MT)	50	50	350	150	400	0
Feed and Residual (1000 MT)	200	380	400	415	500	450
FSI Consumption (1000 MT)	2000	2120	2400	2385	2500	2650
Total Consumption (1000 MT)	2200	2500	2800	2800	3000	3100
Ending Stocks (1000 MT)	350	350	816	1293	1026	2630
Total Distribution (1000 MT)	2550	2850	4016	4243	4426	6230
Yield (MT/HA)	2.2091	2.2091	2.162	2.2856	2.1176	2.5984
(1000 HA) ,(1000 MT) ,(MT/HA)						
MY = Marketing Year, begins with the month listed at the top of each column						
TY = Trade Year, which for Corn begins in October for all countries. TY 2026/2027 = October 2026 - September 2027						
OFFICIAL DATA CAN BE ACCESSED AT: PSD Online Advanced Query						

Production

Overview: A Record Harvest

Marketing year 2026/27 (May 2026-April 2027) marks a historic milestone for Zambia. The government projects a record corn harvest of an estimated 4.9 MMT, driven by three converging factors: (1) highly favorable La Niña rainfall patterns, (2) more efficient, rainfall-aligned application of the Farmer Input Support Program (FISP), and (3) the strategic vision of the Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Program (CATSP). Together, these factors pushed Zambia's harvest 28 percent above the previous record of 3.9 MMT (adjusted¹) set in MY 2025/26 and represent a dramatic turnaround from the severe El Niño-driven drought of MY 2024/25, which limited production to just 1.5 MMT.

¹ The MY 2025/26 corn crop has been adjusted 6 percent upwards from the 3.7 MMT estimated to 3.9 MMT after a Post Harvest Survey was conducted by the [Zambia Statistics Agency \(ZamStats\)](#) in collaboration with the [Ministry of Agriculture](#). The adjustment was triggered by late-stage reconciliations of actual farmer deliveries versus earlier expectations.

Table 2 presents Zambia's corn area harvested, yield, and production over the past three marketing years. White corn makes up nearly all of Zambia's corn production and is used primarily for human consumption.

Table 2: Zambia's Corn Planted Area and Production

MY	Area planted (1,000 ha)	Area harvested (1,000 ha)	Yield (MT/ha)	Prod. (1,000 MT)	Food availability
2024/25	2,209	684	2.2	1,511	Severe deficit
2025/26	2,180	1,691	2.3	3,865	Surplus
2026/27	2,360	1,900	2.6	4,937	Significant surplus

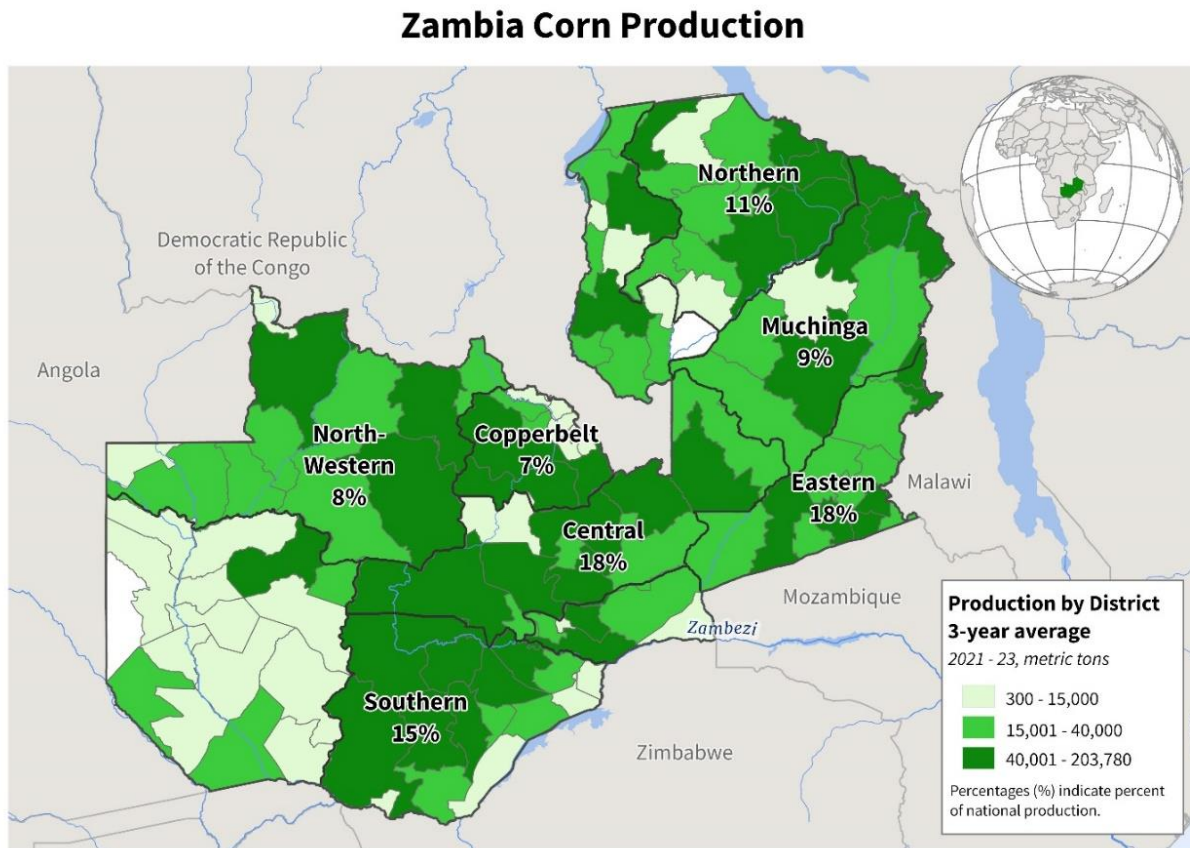
Source: FAS/Pretoria estimates and data from the [Zambian Ministry of Agriculture](#)

Favorable La Niña Rainfall

A powerful climate recovery, driven by a strengthening La Niña weather phenomenon, characterized the MY 2026/27 production season. This shift delivered widespread normal to above-normal rainfall across the country, reversing the damage from previous severe droughts and setting the stage for the record harvest.

Precipitation began early in October across the Western, North-Western, Southern, Luapula, Northern, and parts of Lusaka provinces (see map below), allowing farmers in these areas to plant early and capitalize on excellent early-season moisture. The Eastern, Muchinga, and Copperbelt provinces, along with eastern parts of Central province, faced a dry spell that delayed planting until late November and early December. As the La Niña pattern solidified in December, the entire country experienced heavy, continuous downpours. Although rains ended by mid-March across southern Zambia — requiring farmers to rely on retained soil moisture to bring rain-fed crops to full maturity — the rainy season extended until mid-April across northern regions, supporting long-maturing varieties. Overall, average rainfall remained normal to above-normal across most of Zambia's corn-producing areas.

Figure 1: Zambia's Corn Production Areas



Source: Zambia Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock and Central Statistics Office

Note: Maps and data on production are available from USDA/FAS ([Zambia | USDA Foreign Agricultural Service](#))

More Efficient Application of the Farmer Input Support Program

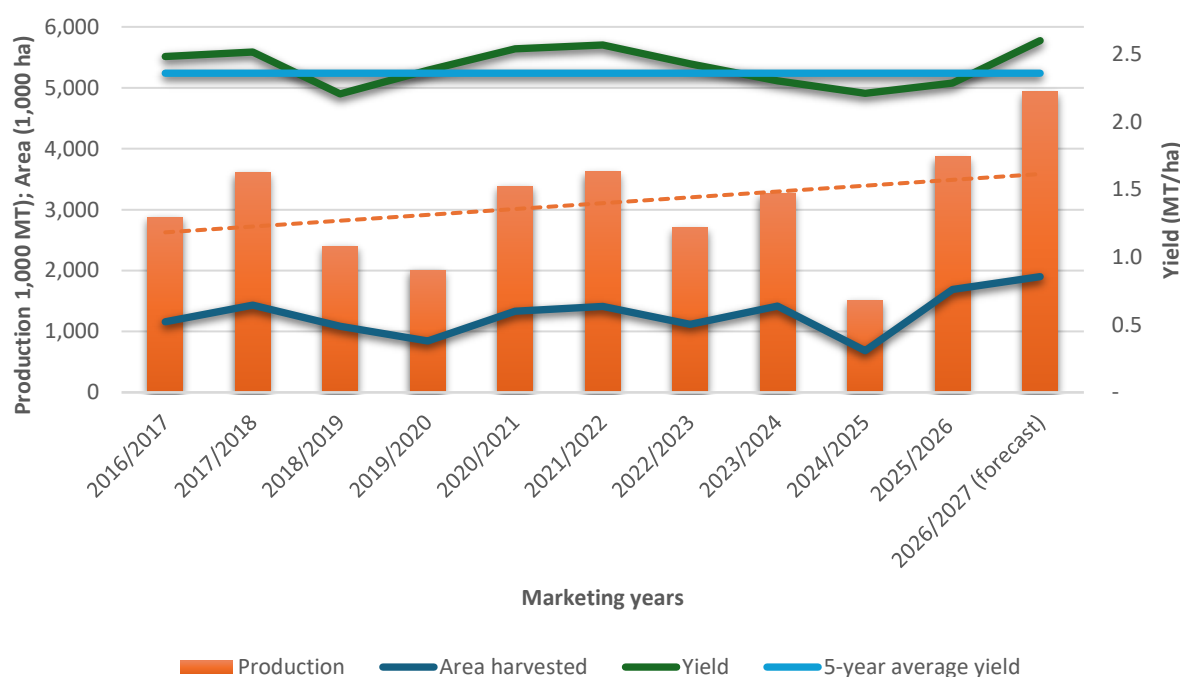
The second key driver of this year's record crop was the Ministry of Agriculture's re-engineering of the [Farmer Input Support Program \(FISP\)](#) to align fertilizer distribution strictly with provincial rainfall arrivals, ensuring inputs reached farmers precisely when they were needed, rather than on a fixed centralized schedule.

The government launched FISP in 2009 to support smallholder productivity through subsidized seed and fertilizer. Small- and medium-scale farmers remain the backbone of Zambian food security, contributing more than 90 percent of the total corn crop; commercial operations account for less than 10 percent and focus heavily on irrigated corn. A 10-bag contribution rule requires farmers who receive subsidized inputs under the FISP to sell a minimum of 10 bags of corn (50kg each) to the state-run [Food Reserve Agency \(FRA\)](#) after harvesting.

Unlike in previous years, where there was centralized gridlock, the state implemented a fully digital e-voucher system this year, targeting more than a million small-scale farmers across all 116 districts. This system allowed localized private agro-dealers to stock and distribute fertilizer well before the rain arrived, directly translating into higher yields and increased area.

Corn yields in MY 2026/27 are projected to reach 2.6 MT/ha, 10 percent higher than Zambia's five-year average of 2.4 MT/ha (see Figure 2) — a gain attributable in large part to the improved input timing. The availability of planting seed and fertilizer also supported an 8 percent increase in the area planted with corn to 2.4 million hectares (MHa).

Figure 2: Zambia's Corn Production and Yield Trends



Source: United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Services ([PS&D Online](#))

The Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Program

Zambia's record MY 2026/27 crop does more than confirm a good rainy season: it signals a structural change in Zambia's agricultural output, one deliberately engineered through the [Comprehensive Agriculture Transformation Support Program's \(CATSP\)](#) long-term policy vision. CATSP, launched in 2024, is a 10-year policy framework (2024–2033) designed to elevate agriculture alongside mining as a core engine of national economic growth. The [Ministry of Agriculture](#) and the [Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock](#) spearhead the program to transition farming from a basic livelihood into a highly productive, commercially viable sector. Interventions include new investments in agriculture, affordable finance, mechanization and technical assistance. To transform Zambia into the regional food hub for Southern Africa, CATSP sets a target of producing 10 MMT of corn per marketing year by 2031. At 4.9 MMT in MY 2026/27, Zambia has reached nearly half of that target.

Biosafety Policy

Operating against these aggressive production targets is a highly conservative biosafety regulatory framework. Zambia maintains a strict but evolving regulatory stance on genetically engineered (GE) crops. Although Zambia rejected GE food aid outright during the 2002 famine, the country has since shifted toward heavily regulated conditional containment under the National Biosafety Authority (NBA). Zambia enforces a zero-cultivation policy for commercial genetically modified crops or animals — no farmer may legally plant GE seeds for commercial cultivation anywhere in the country. This policy is maintained to prevent cross-contamination of Zambia's indigenous non-GE seed pool and to protect its GE-free export status, which carries a premium in stricter global markets. However, Zambia's restrictions are not absolute: processed consumer products containing GE ingredients may still be imported, provided they undergo scientific screening, and the NBA regularly grants targeted, time-bound permits under the Biosafety Act No. 10 of 2007.

Within this framework, the NBA has recently validated four new regulatory guidelines governing GE products. This step will shape the country's biotechnology landscape. The documents were developed through a consultative process and endorsed at a recent stakeholder meeting in Lusaka involving regulators, scientists, public health experts, seed and veterinary authorities, and customs representatives.

The new guidelines cover three distinct areas:

- **Food, feed and processing standards:** Rules for assessing biotechnology-derived commodities intended for consumption.
- **Import procedures:** Harmonized guidelines for the inspection, documentation, and verification of biotechnology commodities entering the country.
- **Confined field trial requirements:** Protocols for containment, monitoring, and compliance within controlled research settings.

These guidelines define institutional roles and standardize procedures among biosafety agencies. Stakeholders also validated the NBA's revised Communications Strategy, which covers stakeholder engagement, public awareness, and risk communication.

Election-Year Market Dynamics

Corn pricing remains one of the most politically sensitive issues in Zambia. Zambia's record MY 2026/27 corn harvest is unfolding against the backdrop of a closely watched general election that took place August 13, 2026. The government faces the challenge of balancing two competing priorities: ensuring adequate prices for small-holder rural farmers and keeping food affordable for urban consumers.

The FRA sits at the center of this balancing act. It sets floor prices to protect farmers from market volatility and sells subsidized corn to millers to help keep retail prices low. In election years, the FRA typically sets higher purchase prices and expands its buying well beyond

standard strategic reserve limits. This strategy bolsters public perceptions of food security and is repeating this cycle.

For MY 2026/27, the FRA increased the corn purchase price by K7 to K347 (US\$18.35²) per 50 kg bag, or K6,940 per ton (US\$367 per ton). Given this year's late rains, the FRA will buy only corn with a moisture level below 12.5 percent to mitigate aflatoxin contamination risks, and it will use a digital payment system to ensure farmers receive payment within three days of delivery.

On the retail side, the FRA releases stored corn at subsidized prices to approved commercial millers, lowering their production costs and, in turn, retail prices. The government also produces and sells its own lower-cost maize meal brand directly through public depots and major retail stores, increasing price competition for private millers. Together, aggressive corn purchasing and subsidized milling reflects a coordinated effort by government to support both farmers and consumers. Even after the election, corn policy will likely remain a significant and closely watched issue, with implications for market stability well beyond this marketing year.

Consumption

White corn, primarily processed into a maize meal locally known as "nshima," remains Zambia's staple grain because it offers the most affordable carbohydrate source available to consumers, supplying roughly 60 percent of caloric intake for Zambia's population of about 20 million. Zambians supplement corn with wheat, sorghum, cassava, and rice as secondary carbohydrate sources.

Corn demand rebounded 12 percent in MY 2025/26, recovering from the sharp drop in MY 2024/25, when prolonged drought severely constrained corn availability and disrupted both domestic supply and export opportunities. FAS/Pretoria projects this recovery will continue, with corn consumption rising a further 10 percent in MY 2026/27 to reach 3.1 MMT, as lower prices and availability will drive demand (see Table 3).

Inflation data support this trend. According to the latest Annual Inflation Report (see [Annual Inflation Report, June 2025-June 2026](#)) from the [Zambia Statistics Agency \(ZamStats\)](#), headline consumer inflation fell to 6.5 percent—an 8-year low—marking a sharp decline from the double-digit rates that strained household budgets at the end of last year. The consumer price index shows clear stabilization across categories:

- **Food Inflation:** Food price growth has slowed markedly, falling from nearly 15 percent in late 2025 to 6.7 percent. A bumper corn harvest, combined with a stabilized local currency, has significantly eased retail price pressure on staples such as maize meal, rice, and cooking oil. A 25kg bag of maize meal has fallen 11.4 percent in price year-on-year.

² US\$1 – Zambian Kwacha (K)18.90 (8/19/2026)

- **Non-Food Inflation:** Non-food prices have also stabilized, helped by a government moratorium temporary suspending the fuel tax, which has cushioned consumers from surging global oil prices.

Improved electricity availability, which supports industrial activity, including corn processing, should further boost demand from millers and animal feed manufacturers. Zambia depends heavily on hydropower, and the 2024 drought drove water levels critically low in key dams, forcing the country into widespread load shedding. Fortunately, a strong recovery in regional rainfall has raised water levels at Kariba Dam and steadily revived Zambia's hydropower generation, ending the grueling 20-hour rolling blackouts. ZESCO, Zambia's national power utility, has officially ruled out a return to nationwide load-shedding for the remainder of the year and beyond, confirming that the grid has stabilized (see [Hydrological Outlook Kariba Dam](#)).

Table 3: Demand for Corn in Zambia (1,000 MT)

MY	Food	Animal feed	Industrial	Losses	Other	TOTAL
2024/25	1,870	380	145	75	30	2,500
2025/26	2,030	415	155	185	15	2,800
2026/27 (estimate)	2,200	450	160	240	50	3,100

Source: FAS/Pretoria estimates and data from the [Zambian Ministry of Agriculture](#)

Broader Economic Recovery

This improved consumption outlook is unfolding against a backdrop of broader macroeconomic recovery. Zambia's economy is staging its strongest performance in eight years, posting a striking 7.7 percent GDP growth rate in the first quarter of 2026. Three factors drive this momentum: a dramatic stabilization of the energy sector, external debt restructuring agreements, and surging global demand for copper. However, institutions such as the World Bank caution that risks remain. Recurring climate volatility and Zambia's continued over-reliance on international mining markets leave its currency exposed to sudden swings in global commodity prices.

Trade

FAS/Pretoria forecasts Zambia's corn exports for MY 2026/27 will reach 500,000 MT, driven by the government's official removal of export bans on raw grain and derivatives following the historic 4.9 MMT bumper harvest. This represents a massive recovery from the El Niño-induced drought of 2024, when production plummeted and resulted in an early export ban to secure domestic supply. FAS/Pretoria estimates corn exports in MY 2025/26 at 150,000 MT: Zambia introduced partial, highly regulated export programs in August 2025 (totaling ~150,000 MT,

primarily to Malawi), but the government did not fully abolish the blanket ban until April 2026, when it confirmed the record MY 2026/27 crop.

Key export markets in MY 2026/27 could include Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Malawi. Despite improved domestic production, Zimbabwe will likely continue importing corn, though import requirements are projected to decline by 25 percent to 600,000 MT (see GAIN Report [Zimbabwe Grain and Feed Annual](#)). Most of these imports will likely originate from South Africa, which has more than 3 MMT available for export. Zambia will instead focus its exports on the northern parts of Zimbabwe closer to the shared border. The southern provinces of the DRC heavily rely on corn imports, though Zambian exporters again face intense competition from South Africa, which secured a dominant market share during Zambia's previous export bans. Cross-border informal trade between Zambia and Malawi remains fluid and active.

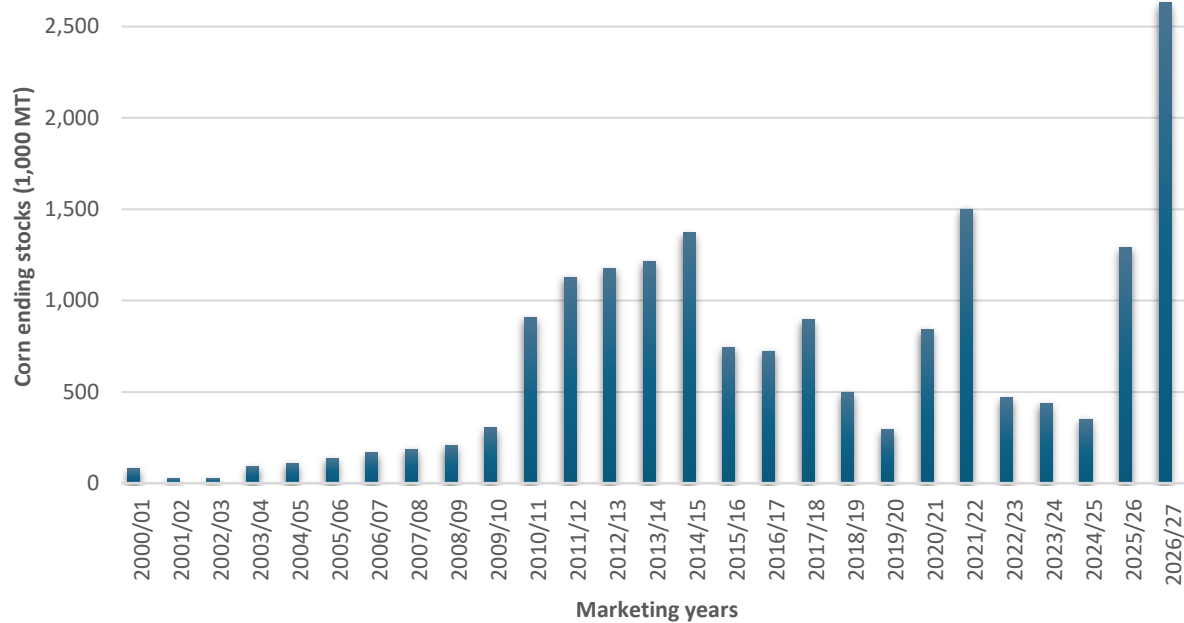
However, despite Zambia's corn oversupply and the removal of export bans, FAS/Pretoria predicts total exports will not reach their full potential due to a conservative food security strategy. With meteorologists warning of a potential El Niño recurrence later in the 2026/27 farming season, the government is deliberately retaining a higher-than-usual carry-over ending stock as a domestic safety cushion.

Stocks

FAS/Pretoria forecasts Zambia's corn ending stocks for MY 2026/27 reaching a record level of 2.6 MMT, double the 1.3 MMT that Zambia recorded in MY 2025/26 (see Figure 3). Public and private entities split Zambia's total storage capacity. The FRA owns a national network of storage sheds, concrete silos, and bunkers that together provide more than 1 MMT of secure capacity. The FRA also opened an additional 1,749 satellite depots countrywide to receive the record harvest of MY 2026/27. The agency typically targets strategic reserves of around 500,000 MT, equal to about two months of national needs. However, as noted above, the government is deliberately retaining a higher-than-usual carry-over ending stock this year due to the elections and warnings of a potential El Niño event. Private milling companies hold an estimated additional 1.2 MMT of commercial storage.

Corn forms the cornerstone of Zambia's food security, providing 60 percent of the population's caloric intake. Any disruption in its availability or affordability risks triggering widespread dissatisfaction, particularly among rural communities where smallholder farmers dominate. The government must maintain stable corn supplies and affordable prices to sustain public trust, particularly during election periods. Higher stock levels bolster the perception of food security, a strategy the government has also employed in previous election years. The record ending stock effectively immunizes Zambia's domestic food supply against potential crop failures in the immediate term.

Figure 3: Zambia's Corn Ending Stocks



Source: United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Services ([PS&D Online](#))

Attachments:

No Attachments.