

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Zambia Resumes Corn Exports Amid Record-Breaking Production

Country: Zambia

Post: Pretoria

Report Category: Grain and Feed

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Report Highlights:

Zambia has resumed corn exports following a record-breaking harvest in marketing year 2025/26, marking a significant recovery from drought-affected marketing year 2024/25. In August 2025, the government lifted its export ban and launched a corn and corn meal export program, targeting key markets like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Malawi. Favorable weather conditions drove strong production, while lower corn prices and improved electricity supplies are expected to boost domestic consumption. With food security and stable corn supplies prioritized ahead of the 2026 presidential election, challenges remain, including restrictive policies on genetically engineered crops and broader economic issues like high debt, inflation and unemployment levels.

Executive Summary

- **Production:** Zambia achieved a record-breaking corn harvest of 3.7 million metric tons (MMT) in marketing year (MY) 2025/26, a dramatic rebound from the drought impacted MY 2024/25, which yielded only 1.5 MMT. Favorable weather conditions and consistent rainfall throughout the season contributed to above-average yields, reinforcing Zambia's position as a key regional producer.
- **Consumption:** Domestic corn consumption in MY 2025/26 is forecast to surge by 27 percent, reaching 2.8 MMT. This growth is fueled by lower corn prices, improved electricity availability, and the government's removal of the corn meal export ban, which is driving higher demand from local millers.
- **Trade:** On August 15, 2025, the Zambian government lifted its corn export ban, authorizing the export of 64,000 metric tons (MT), primarily to Malawi. Informal cross-border trade with Malawi is also expected to remain robust, with total exports projected to reach 400,000 MT, strengthening Zambia's role in regional food security.
- **Stocks:** Ending stocks for MY 2025/26 are projected at 805,000 MT, more than double the 350,000 MT recorded in MY 2024/25. This substantial increase not only ensures food security but also reinforces public confidence in the government's agricultural policies ahead of the 2026 presidential elections.

Corn

Table 1: Corn Production, Supply and Distribution

Corn Market Year Begins Zambia	2023/2024		2024/2025		2025/2026	
	May 2023		May 2024		May 2025	
	USDA Official	New Post	USDA Official	New Post	USDA Official	New Post
Area Harvested (1000 HA)	1418	1418	685	685	1400	1400
Beginning Stocks (1000 MT)	467	467	440	440	150	350
Production (1000 MT)	3263	3263	1510	1510	3400	3655
MY Imports (1000 MT)	10	10	650	600	50	0
TY Imports (1000 MT)	100	100	550	500	10	0
TY Imp. from U.S. (1000 MT)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total Supply (1000 MT)	3740	3740	2600	2550	3600	4005
MY Exports (1000 MT)	500	500	0	0	0	400
TY Exports (1000 MT)	200	200	0	0	0	0
Feed and Residual (1000 MT)	475	475	200	200	450	400
FSI Consumption (1000 MT)	2325	2325	2250	2000	2400	2400
Total Consumption (1000 MT)	2800	2800	2450	2200	2850	2800
Ending Stocks (1000 MT)	440	440	150	350	750	805
Total Distribution (1000 MT)	3740	3740	2600	2550	3600	4005
Yield (MT/HA)	2.3011	2.3011	2.2044	2.2044	2.4286	2.6107
(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 2025/2026 = October 2025 - September 2026						
OFFICIAL DATA CAN BE ACCESSED AT: PSD Online Advanced Query						

Production

Zambia's corn crop production is forecast to more than double to 3.7 MMT in MY 2025/26 (May 2025 to April 2026), marking a historic high. This rebound follows the severe drought caused by the El Niño event in MY 2024/25, which limited production to just 1.5 MMT. Although the season began late, consistent rainfall across the country since mid-December 2024 significantly boosted plant growth, with favorable weather persisting throughout the season to deliver above-average yields. Farmers maintained corn planting area at elevated levels, driven by relatively high domestic prices, though this came at the expense of soybean acreage.

Smallholder farmers dominate Zambia's agricultural sector, contributing about 93 percent of the total estimated corn production. Furthermore, approximately 90 percent of Zambia's corn is grown under rain-fed conditions due to limited access to irrigation technologies. To support smallholder productivity, the Zambian government launched the [Farmer Input Support Program \(FISP\)](#) in 2009, providing subsidized seed and fertilizer. In the 2024/25 production season, over one million smallholder farmers relied on FISP inputs. Participants in the program are required to

sell at least ten 50kg bags of corn to the [Zambian Food Reserve Agency \(FRA\)](#) at the end of the season.

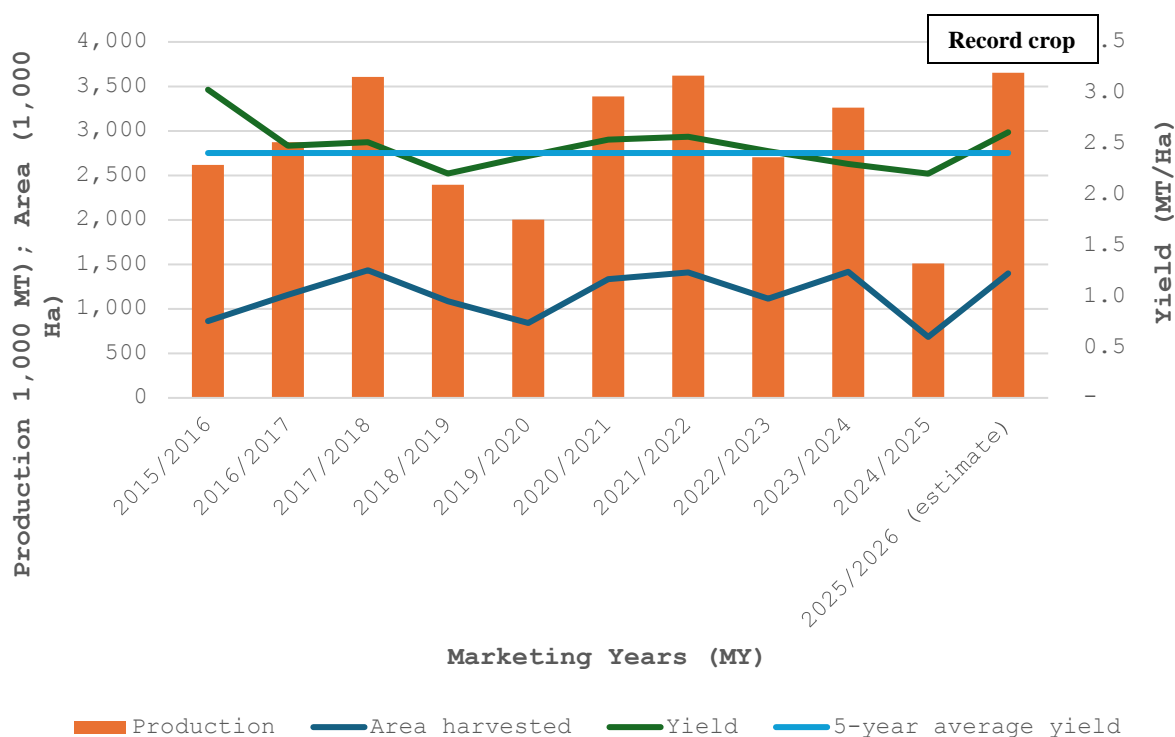
In June 2025, FRA announced it would purchase corn at K340 (Kwacha) per 50 kg bag (K6,800/MT or \$292/MT¹), an increase from the K330 per 50 kg bag set last season and above the general market price of \$235/MT. Corn pricing remains politically sensitive in Zambia, with the government frequently intervening to set floor prices through the FRA to protect farmers from market volatility. At the same time, the government sells corn to millers at subsidized rates to keep retail prices low for consumers. These measures often align with political priorities, particularly ahead of elections, as maintaining steady corn supplies and stable prices bolsters public confidence. With Zambia's next presidential elections scheduled for 2026, corn policies are expected to remain central to the government's agenda.

Corn yields in MY 2025/26 are projected to reach 2.6 metric tons per hectare (MT/Ha), 8 percent higher than Zambia's five-year average of 2.4 MT/Ha (see Figure 1). Despite these improvements, Zambia's corn yields continue to lag those of South American countries and South Africa (see Figure 2). Zambia has historically maintained a cautious stance on genetically engineered (GE) products, particularly in agriculture. The country prohibits the cultivation of GE crops, including GE corn, under its current biosafety legislation. This restrictive approach stems from concerns about environmental impacts, food safety, and the potential loss of access to European markets, which often favor non-GE products. However, Zambia appears to be shifting toward a more science-based approach to biotechnology.

Recent progress in revising Zambia's biosafety policy signals a potential move toward greater acceptance of GE products. If adopted, these changes could pave the way for legislation that allows Zambia to leverage biotechnology to improve crop yields, combat pests and diseases, and mitigate climate change impacts, such as droughts. This shift could position Zambia to better compete in regional and global markets while enhancing food security and agricultural resilience.

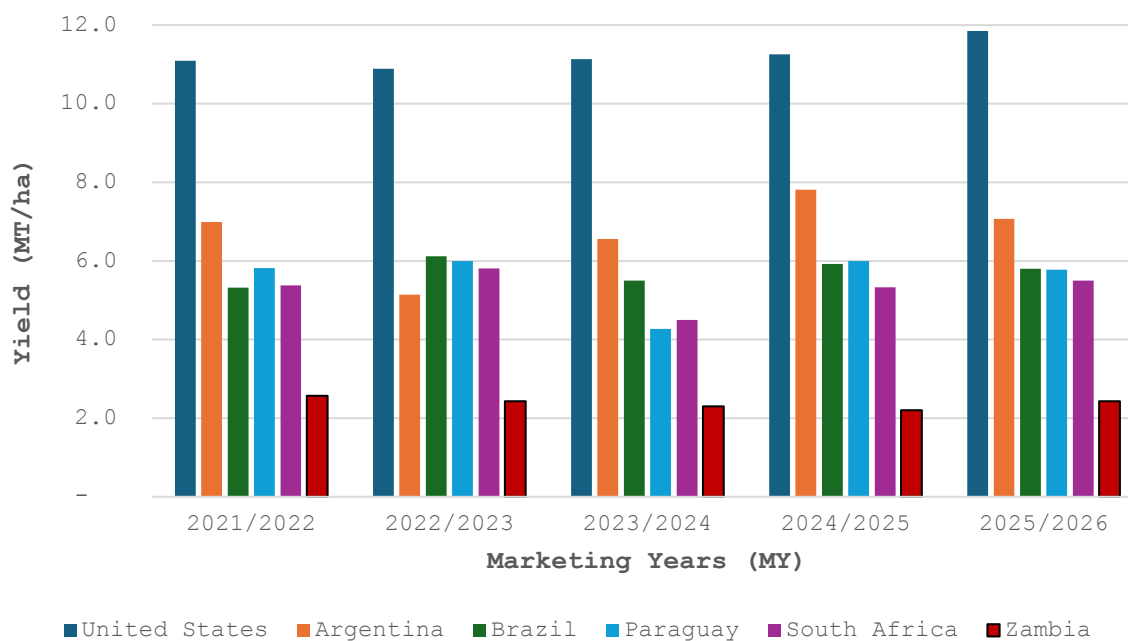
¹ 1 USD = 23.30 Zambian Kwacha (20/08/2025)

Figure 1: Zambia's Corn Production and Yield Trends



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

Figure 2: Corn Yield Comparisons



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

Table 2 provides, and overview of the area harvested, yield, and production of corn in Zambia over the past three marketing years. Nearly all the corn planted in Zambia is white corn, which is primarily grown 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)
2023/24	1,896	1,418	2.3	3,262
2024/25	2,220	685	2.2	1,510
2025/26 (estimate)	2,180	1,400	2.6	3,655

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

Consumption

White corn, primarily processed into maize meal (locally known as “nshima”), remains the staple grain for human consumption in Zambia due to its affordability as a carbohydrate source. Corn accounts for approximately 60 percent of the caloric intake for Zambia’s population of 20 million. In addition to corn, Zambians consume wheat, sorghum, cassava, and rice as supplementary carbohydrate sources. FAS/Pretoria projects a 27 percent increase in corn consumption in MY 2025/26, reaching 2.8 MMT, driven by lower corn prices following a record harvest (see Table 3).

Improved electricity availability is also expected to boost demand for corn from millers and animal feed manufacturers. Zambia relies heavily on hydropower, and the 2024 drought caused electricity shortages due to low water levels in dams, resulting in widespread load shedding. Favorable rainfall in 2025 has replenished water levels thus increasing electricity supply and supporting industrial activity, including corn processing.

On August 15, 2025, the Zambian government lifted its corn export ban, which had been in place since early 2024, and introduced a corn and corn meal export program. This initiative, running through December 31, 2025, allocates approximately 350,000 MT of corn meal for export, driving increased demand from local millers. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is expected to be the primary market for these exports, as its southern provinces rely heavily on Zambian corn meal as a staple food.

The export ban had significantly disrupted corn meal supplies to the DRC’s southern provinces. To mitigate the impact, Zambia permitted South African corn meal imports to transit through its territory to the DRC. During MY 2024/25, South Africa exported over 300,000 MT of corn meal to the DRC, maintaining a steady trade flow of approximately 25,000 MT per month into MY

2025/26. With Zambia’s new export program, the country is poised to regain its share of the DRC market.

Zambia’s economic outlook is cautiously optimistic. Economic growth is projected to rise to 6.2 percent in 2025, up from 4 percent in 2024, with further growth anticipated in 2026. Inflation trends are improving, albeit from a high base, with annual inflation slowing to 13 percent in July 2025, down from 14.1 percent in June 2025. Food inflation also eased, dropping to 15.3 percent in July from 16.7 percent in June, largely due to falling cereal prices. Retail prices for a 25 kg bag of corn meal declined by 17.7 percent year-on-year, providing relief to households. However, achieving sustainable growth will require addressing structural challenges, including diversifying the economy, creating more productive jobs (current unemployment stands at 12 percent), and improving resilience to external and climate-related shocks.

Debt remains a critical issue for Zambia’s economy. The country defaulted on its external debt in 2020, becoming the first African nation to do so during the pandemic. Since then, Zambia has worked to restructure its debt with support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In 2022, Zambia secured a \$1.3 billion IMF bailout package aimed at stabilizing the economy and implementing fiscal reforms. Despite these efforts, debt servicing continues to consume a significant portion of government revenue, limiting resources for development and social programs.

Zambia’s corn demand in MY 2024/25 fell by 21 percent due to the prolonged drought, which severely reduced corn availability and disrupted both domestic supply and export opportunities. The electricity crisis further hindered processing operations, while high inflation and sluggish economic growth weakened purchasing power, compounding the decline in demand. With improved production, electricity availability, and economic conditions in MY 2025/26, Zambia’s corn sector is positioned for recovery and growth.

Table 3: Demand for Corn in Zambia

Marketing Year	Food, seed and industrial (FSI)	Feed and residual	Total
(1,000 MT)			
2023/24	2,325	475	2,800
2024/25	2,000	200	2,200
2025/26 (estimate)	2,400	400	2,800

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

Trade

In response to the severe drought and reduced corn supplies in early 2024, Zambia imposed a corn export ban to safeguard domestic food security. However, following a record-breaking harvest in MY 2025/26, the government lifted the ban on August 15, 2025, and introduced a corn and corn meal export program. This program allocated approximately 64,000 MT of corn for export, with Malawi expected to be the primary market. Malawi relies on imports to supplement its local production and meet domestic demand.

Despite the formal export program, FAS/Pretoria projects that total corn trade between Zambia and Malawi could reach 400,000 MT due to cross-border informal trade that occurs on a continuing basis. Informal trade remains a critical component of food security for both countries, often responding more efficiently to price fluctuations and supply shortages than formal channels.

FAS/Pretoria forecasts that Zambia will not import corn in MY 2025/26 due to the record harvest and relatively lower domestic corn prices compared to neighboring countries. This marks a sharp contrast to MY 2024/25, when Zambia imported an estimated 600,000 MT of corn, primarily from Tanzania. In April 2024, the Zambian government authorized private-sector imports of white and yellow corn but required a “Genetically Modified Organism” (GMO)-free certificate from the country of origin. This restriction effectively excluded South African corn, where over 85 percent of the crop is grown using GE seeds, leaving Tanzania as Zambia’s sole supplier.

South Africa, the largest corn producer in southern Africa, exported 2.3 MMT of corn in MY 2024/25, with most shipments directed to neighboring countries, particularly Zimbabwe, where import demand surged following a drought-stricken season. Zambia’s restrictive GE policy underscores the complexities of regional trade dynamics, as it limits access to South Africa’s abundant corn supplies while prioritizing imports from Tanzania.

Stocks

FAS/Pretoria estimates Zambia’s corn ending stocks for MY 2025/26 at 805,000 MT, more than double the 350,000 MT recorded in MY 2024/25. The Zambian FRA primarily holds these stocks and annually purchases corn to maintain a national strategic food reserve. The FRA, established in 1995, plays a critical role in ensuring food security by safeguarding a reliable corn supply during shortages caused by droughts, floods, or other natural disasters. The agency typically targets strategic reserves of around 500,000 MT, equaling about two months of national needs.

Corn is the cornerstone of Zambia’s food security, providing 60 percent of the population’s caloric intake. Any disruption in its availability or affordability risks widespread dissatisfaction, particularly among rural communities where smallholder farmers dominate. Maintaining stable corn supplies and affordable prices is essential for sustaining public trust in the government, particularly during election periods. With 2026 being a presidential election year, higher stock levels bolster the perception of food security, a strategy also observed in the lead-up to previous elections.

Zambia's formal storage capacity exceeds 2 MMT, but the FRA expanded its infrastructure to accommodate the anticipated record corn crop. The agency opened 1,428 additional satellite depots nationwide, providing farmers with convenient delivery points for their harvests. To manage operations, the FRA employed 2,856 temporary staff, ensuring efficient handling and storage of the surplus crop.

Attachments:

No Attachments.