

# Some food for thought on the future of food

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Currently many 'what if' questions are being asked about food, the economy and unemployment. What if there is not enough maize? What if we have another drought next year? What if the rand continues to slide against major currencies? What if the oil price shoots up again over \$120/barrel? What if economic growth does not take off? What if unemployment rates increase? What if...?



The Southern African Food Lab recently asked its own set of 'what if' questions regarding the future of the food system (which includes all components of production, processing, distribution and consumption in the food value chain) in South Africa between now and 2030. The Food Lab, in collaboration with various stakeholders in the food system, developed and sketched four scenarios regarding the food system in South Africa, titled "Transformative Scenarios Report: The future of food 2015-2030".

Firstly, it is important to understand the concept of transformative scenarios. These are scenarios or stories about what could happen in the future and not what will happen or what should happen. It is therefore not a forecast of the future. The main aim of the scenarios is to create dialogue and debate about what can be done differently to adapt to and to transform an uncertain future.

The scenarios were created by a multi-stakeholder group of people participating somewhere in the food system, whose assumptions about current realities and future possibilities will definitely differ. These scenarios are designed to be clear, relevant and plausible as well as responsive to current trends, but they are also challenging, perhaps something that was long overdue in the current food system.

## Four scenarios

The four scenarios deal with the natural resource base, food production, the political economy and nutrition. Scenario 1 tells the story of the impact of severe weather conditions, especially drought, on the vulnerable food system, which is even further hampered by energy insecurity. Scenario 2 traces an imagined sequence of events in land reform and farming productivity in a polarised sector. The third scenario focuses on dynamics of pricing and affordability of food as the rand depreciates, while the fourth scenario explores possible impacts of malnourishment on economic growth.

One of the events mentioned in one of the scenarios is the impact of a severe drought on food prices. This might sound familiar, given that we have a much lower maize crop this year compared to previous years, because of a drought in the western production areas. This will definitely have an impact on food prices and subsequently on inflation in the longer run.

Adding to this is the sharp decline in the value of the rand, with a resultant expectation of a fuel price increase of more than R 1/litre, excluding the fuel levies, which will even add more to the burden of the consumer. This reiterates how vulnerable and uncertain the future of food is, since everything happened in a matter of weeks, not years, as described in the scenarios.

The question to ask is 'so what?' Most probably a fair question, considering that we are still food secure on a national level. Even then, it is the start of a conversation and discussion of the food system in future. For players within the food system, such as FNB with an agricultural value chain mandate, this type of discussions and debate is important. This is after all the future of our business.

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