

Late harvest affects entire agricultural industry

The aftermath of one of the worst droughts in over a century has offered embattled farmers little respite. Owing to the planting of crops being delayed as the rains continued to stay away, many farmers may not have begun, or have only just completed harvesting what little crops they could salvage. No sooner has the hard work been completed, then they have to start planning for the coming season. Investing for the coming season is difficult in the face of diminished profits, however, that is exactly what is needed to turn around any lingering aftereffects of the drought.

By [Frank Winder](#) 15 Aug 2016



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Many people only realise how dependent we are on our farmers once a drought hits. As the rains stayed away this year, farmers continued to delay sowing their crops to the point where they could not wait any longer. Many farmers even chose to plant sunflowers instead of maize. While these later crops were also hard hit by the drought, the survival rate was better than those planted earlier. In fact, the rains came too late to save much of the country's summer grain crops. This means that the little local maize and summer crop that were produced during the drought only became available to the market later, further affecting food prices and food security in the country.

It is, therefore, no surprise that food price inflation has hit double-digit inflation this year, with the price of yellow maize going up by as much as 30%. This, at least, meant that farmers could secure a better price for their diminished yields, but not enough to make up the shortfall. Farmers were also squeezed for cash flow as the little money that did come in, came in much later than usual.

A lasting effect

In addition to the current havoc the drought is creating, it also has lasting effects on the soil and farmers' pockets, meaning that the recovery process could take several years. The late harvests have compounded the issue, giving farmland less time to recover before the new planting season begins.

With farmers having to wait longer before getting paid for their crops, planning for the coming season is already delayed. After two years of below-average rainfall, this may well be a daunting task, but one that needs to be

tackled head on. As one of the strongest El Niño events since 1950 dissipates, farmers can hopefully look forward to more predictable climate conditions in the coming season.

Soil quality increasingly important

It cannot be denied that where good soil fertility practices were followed, better yields were often forthcoming. It is, therefore, not a time to be timid about soil conditioning, but to take all necessary steps to make the investments to return the soil to prime condition in the shortest possible time span, to take advantage of good conditions when they return.

At the same time, farmers need to be aware of the fact that droughts may, in future, become more common. Meteorological data shows that the earth's temperatures have been steadily climbing, which foreshadows more droughts in the future. However, that does not mean that there will not be many seasons of adequate rainfall in between. In such an unpredictable environment, soil quality is becoming increasingly important to pull crops through. The farmers who accept this reality and adapt the best, are bound to be the most successful.

Although this year may be one of the worst farmers experience in their working lives, there is reason to believe that farms will recover, as they always do. As is the case with any business, the farmers who have planned the best for the times when conditions are good, will be the ones who reap the biggest rewards.

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