

The weather is again a central focus in South Africa's agriculture

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The weather will be the main focus in South Africa's agriculture for both summer and winter crops, and to a lesser extent, horticulture in the near term. The summer crop growing areas are approaching a harvest period, with early planted soybeans and sunflower seed already being harvested across the country. In contrast, maize and sorghum harvesting has only started in a few areas, such as the early planted ones in Mpumalanga. The harvesting process requires dry weather conditions, and the same is needed for crops that are already maturing across the country.

On 31 March 2021, the South African Weather Service confirmed that South Africa is still in a La Niña state. Its multi-model rainfall forecast indicates mostly above-normal rainfall during late-autumn (Apr-May-Jun) and early-winter (May-Jun-Jul). Nevertheless, it is unclear how much rain will materialize. We hope that it will mostly be light showers with minimal impact on crops. Over the past few weeks, the weather conditions have generally been favourable across South Africa, although with frequent light rains, which so far have had minimal impact on crops.

The Crop Estimates Committee forecasts South Africa's 2020/21 summer grain and oilseeds production at 18,7 million tonnes, up by 6% from the 2019/20 season. The upward adjustments were on maize, soybeans, sorghum and groundnuts, whereas sunflower seed and dry bean production are lower than the 2019/20 production season. Viewed from these data, South Africa is looking at its second-largest harvest on record. If weather conditions remain reasonably dry in the next few months, the crop quality could also be good, which will potentially bode well for farmers' incomes.

In winter crops – wheat, barley, canola and oats – the planting period will start towards the end of this month. Contrary to the summer crop-growing regions, the winter crop ones will require increased moisture to support crops' germination and growth process. The weather forecast, for now, remains uncertain. The South African Weather Service recently noted that "a mixed forecast is indicated for the far south-western parts of the country; thus, the expected rainfall conditions for this area are at this stage uncertain."

Aside from the Western Cape, which typically accounts for two-thirds of winter wheat plantings and most barley and oats, and all canola plantings, soil moisture has improved for various regions of the country following higher summer rainfall. This should be beneficial for plantings later this month, and the dam levels are also in reasonably good shape in some provinces, which should be helpful for crops in the irrigation areas. The Western Cape conditions will mainly depend on how weather conditions develop from the current uncertain stage in the coming weeks, influencing the planting decisions in terms of the size of area plantings, and subsequently, crop conditions.

In terms of horticulture, the recent higher rainfall across the country has generally been favourable for fruits and vegetables. The significant fruits that will be harvested in the coming weeks are citrus, and the forecasts point to a large harvest. The Citrus Growers' Association

[recently noted](#) that the "South African citrus industry would likely break all previous export season records with an estimated 158,7 million cartons in 2021. If the estimate is reached, it will represent a third consecutive season of record export volumes, with 130 million cartons exported in 2019, followed by 146 million cartons in 2020."

In sum, the summer crop growing areas require drier weather conditions in the future as the harvest process begins. Such weather conditions are essential for maintaining the harvested grain and oilseeds' good quality and permitting the harvest process to gain momentum. Meanwhile, for winter crop growing areas, such as the Western Cape, rain is required to improve soil moisture and support the planting, germination, and growth of the crops. Other winter crop growing areas have reasonably good soil moisture from higher summer rains, and dam levels have improved, which all supports the winter crop planting process, which will begin at the end of this month.

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