

Kenya needs massive maize imports

By Wandile Sihlobo, 20 June 2019

The subject of -- maize needs -- this year will not only [dominate headlines](#) in Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Kenya too has a problem. The country's maize production could fall by 10% year-on-year to 3.6 million tonnes in 2019, according to [data](#) from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

You see, Kenya utilizes about 4.7 million tonnes a year, so this already tells us that there will be a need for massive imports this year. Even worse, the opening stocks, which in some instances provide a cushion when maize production is low, were quite thin at the start of the year, at about 416 00 tonnes.

As a result, Kenya may need to import about 1.0 million tonnes of maize this year (2019/20) in order to fulfil its annual needs. This will be the largest volume since 2017 when Kenya imported about 1.4 million tonnes. In those years, the countries that came in to help Kenya included Mexico, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Ukraine.

Similarly to what I [discussed in the previous post](#) regarding Zimbabwe, this year around, it is unclear where Kenya will get the maize supplies as the likes of South Africa and Zambia, who were suppliers in the past seasons, will [have tight supplies](#) due to lower domestic production in 2018/19 production season. South Africa could have about 1.1 million tonnes for exports, but this will largely be destined for Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Eswatini.

Another important factor is that Kenya will likely be looking for white maize which is scarcer globally. Outside of the Southern African region, the only reliable white maize supplier could be Mexico, with about a million tonnes of maize for the export market in the 2019/20 marketing year, according to [data](#) from the USDA. Aside from white maize, Kenya can import yellow maize from Brazil, Argentina, Ukraine and the U.S., amongst others.

This is indeed a difficult year for Kenya, and maize needs will for sure dominate the headlines in some corners of the country in the coming months. In fact, at the start of this month, [World-Grain.com](#) ran an article titled -- [Kenya facing maize shortage crisis](#).

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