

CONTENTS

Summaries and Calendar	1
Cost of Living Continues to Rise	2
Maize Deficit Projected	3

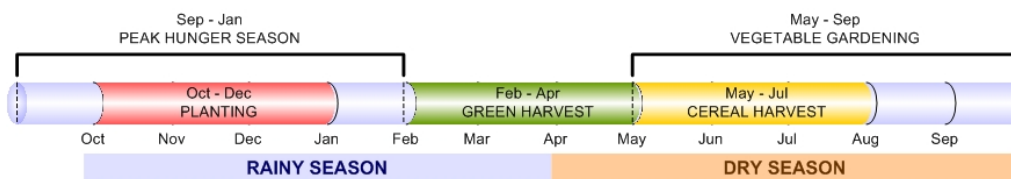
Summary and Implications

The food security situation throughout Zimbabwe remained precarious during January and February 2006. The availability of staple cereals for purchase was erratic and grossly inadequate throughout the country. Maize was only occasionally available on markets either as grain or flour in both rural and urban centers. Extremely high maize prices and the escalating cost of living continue to make it difficult for poor households to purchase sufficient quantities of staple cereals, complementary foods and other basic household goods.

However, food assistance programs in nearly all rural districts of Zimbabwe helped about 52 percent of the rural population access adequate cereals they would otherwise have failed to get on their own. Also, wild foods such as mushrooms and edible worms did not only make a marked contribution to many rural households' food needs in January and February, but also presented households with opportunities for earning cash income they could use to purchase other foods and non-food household necessities. This is very important given that income generating opportunities have continued to dwindle in step with the economic decline Zimbabwe is experiencing. General food availability will improve further with the green harvest (okra, pumpkins, groundnuts, squashes and maize) that began in late February 2006.

Preliminary indications reveal that this year's maize production will be greater than last year's 550,000 MT but well below the 1990's average, and below national consumption requirements estimated at between 1,600,000 and 1,700,000 MT for 2006. Producers of staple cereals faced numerous challenges that include critical shortages of fuel and fertilizers and excessive rainfall that leached soil nutrients in many places. Labor shortages were common among the newly resettled commercial farmers and this, together with the excessive rainfall, hampered adequate and timely weeding.

Seasonal Calendar



Current Hazard Summary

- Shortage and high price of maize.
- High annual inflation - measured in January 2006 at 613 percent - which has further eroded purchasing power.
- Projected maize deficit for 2006/07 consumption year.

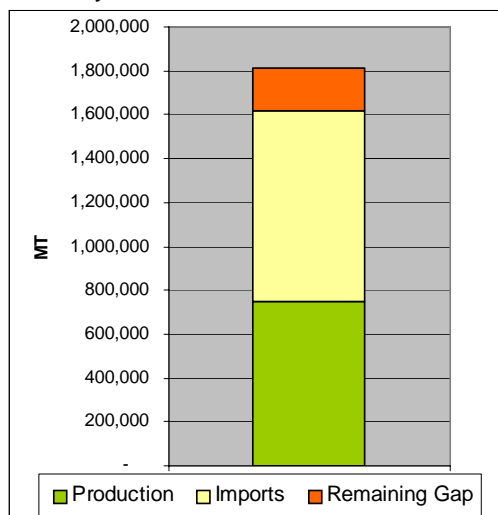
Food Security Summary

Sub-national maize availability remains tight despite improvements at the national level

Commercial and food aid maize imports from South Africa to Zimbabwe continued in January and February 2006. According to the South African Grain Information Services (SAGIS), imports averaged about 19,670 MT per week from April 1, 2005 to February 10, 2006; total cumulative maize imports during this period were about 868,980 MT. As of February 10, 2006 the remaining maize gap for the 2005/06 consumption year was about 197,000 MT (Figure 1). If the current rate of maize importation is maintained, an end of the consumption year a gap of about 40,000 MT is expected.

Despite considerable maize imports, the scarcity of maize and maize meal has intensified significantly in January and February 2006 compared to what it was in December 2005 throughout all rural districts of the country, as households run out of food and become increasingly dependent on the market for their food supply. In January and February, Grain Marketing Board (GMB) maize distributions were significantly reduced and maize meal supplies from private millers were more erratic. The households in the southern districts of Matebeleland South were among the populations that experienced the most severe maize meal shortages in the country during the month of January. For unknown reasons, GMB maize grain supplies to millers in Bulawayo and the neighboring towns and services centers were disrupted. The rural districts in the north-central parts of the country, which have been consistently reporting local maize grain sales since the 2004/05 harvest, also reported significant reductions in maize availability in January and February. Ongoing WFP and C-SAFE food aid programs were the only dependable source of maize for about 52 percent of the rural population in January.

Figure 1: National level maize availability, February 10, 2006



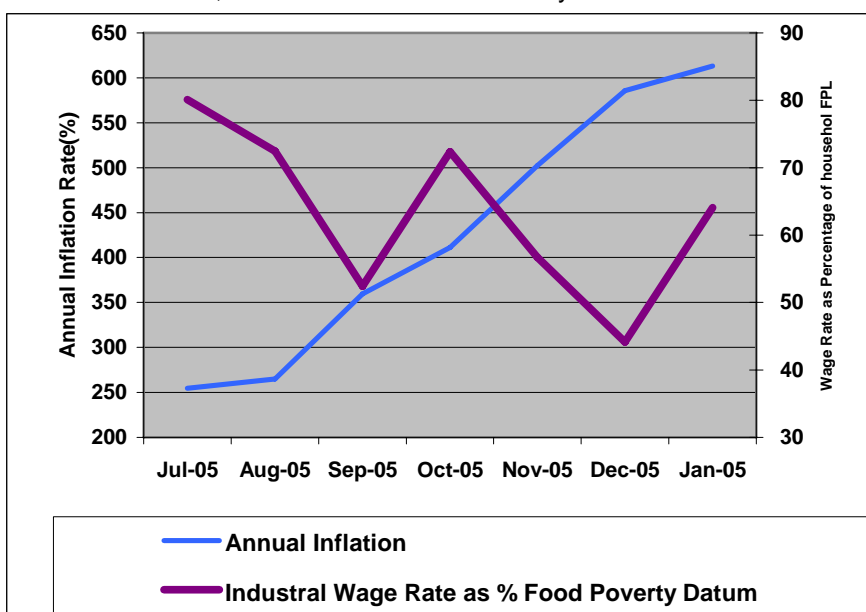
Source: SAGIS and Ministry of Finance-Zimbabwe

Mushrooms and mangoes, which contributed substantially to both household food and cash income in December and early January, went out of season in mid January. Greatly reduced quantities of mushrooms and mangoes could, however, still be found in some districts of Masvingo, Midlands and Matebeleland North provinces. For their own consumption and sale, households in a few isolated areas in the Mashonaland provinces and in Gokwe District started their green harvest (okra, pumpkins, groundnuts, squashes and maize) in early February. The number of households benefiting from the green harvest will increase drastically from early March. *Mopani* worms emerged as expected in December and January 2006 in the southern areas of Gwanda, Kezi and Mwenzi districts. Many households in these areas harvested *mopani* worms for consumption and sale, and earned substantial cash income for the purchase of maize meal.

Cost of Living Continues to Rise

Since March 2005, the annual rate of inflation measured by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) increased by about 490 percentage points to 613.2 percent in January 2006. This inflation rate is just 9.6 percentage points below the all time peak of 622.8 percent reached in January 2004. Month on month inflation averaged 25 percentage points from July 2005 to January 2006. In January 2006, the price of maize grain in Harare was over 1,860 percent higher than it was a year ago and that of bread was over 2,100 percent higher. All price increases were substantially above the annual rate of inflation for the same period. This trend is consistent for all basic commodities. Consequently the cost of living continues to rise beyond the reach of many poor households. The minimum expenditure for a household of five that enables each member to consume at least 2,100 kilocalories per day, the food poverty datum line (FPL), continued to exceed income levels for poor households. In July 2005 the commercial sector minimum monthly wage, a proxy for poor urban households' income levels, could cover only about 80 percent of the FPL. In December 2005 the commercial sector wage could only cover about 44 percent of the

Figure 2: Annual rate of inflation compared to the minimum wage rate of a low-income earner, indexed on the Food Poverty Line



Source: CSO, ZCTU

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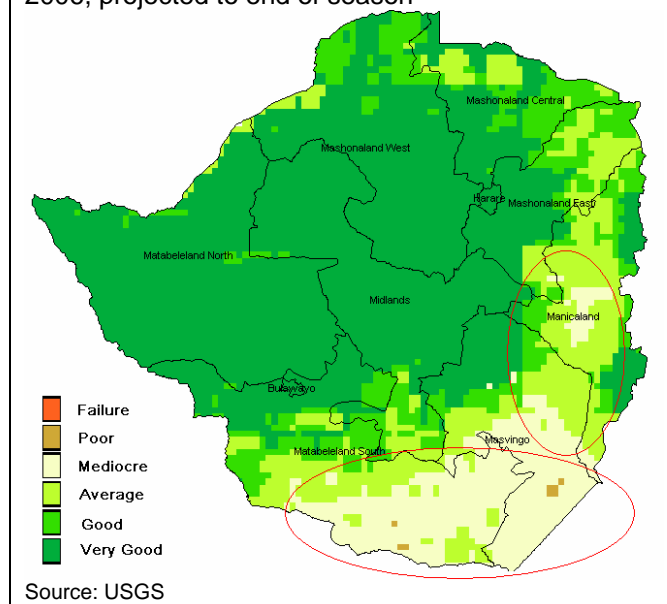
FPL. The situation improved a bit with wage rate increases that were completed in January 2006, but the monthly wage rate could then only cover 64 percent of the FPL (Figure 2). Since current inflationary pressures are forecasted to remain high in the near future, the prospect of a fall in the cost of living is highly unlikely.

The Reserve Bank Governor projected the annual inflation rate to peak at 800 percent in March 2006 and to fall to around 200 percent by the end of the year. The view was predicated on the assumption that the 2005/06 agricultural harvest will be very good. On the contrary, independent economists believe the annual inflation rate is likely to be well above the 800 percent mark around March and April 2006, because they do not anticipate a revival of the economy sufficient enough to slow down the high inflationary pressures in the near future.

Maize Deficit Projected for the 2006/07 Consumption Year

The 2005/06 rainfall season was normal to above normal for the greater part of the country, save for the central parts of Manicaland Province and the southern parts of Masvingo and Matabeleland South provinces. The January-February dry spell in Manicaland (the upper red circle) and southern parts of Masvingo and Matabeleland South provinces (the bottom red circle) adversely affected crop yields in these areas (Figure 3). Water logging was a problem in isolated parts of the regions that received above-normal rainfall. Leaching of both inherent soil fertility and artificially applied fertilizers was highly prevalent and most evident in areas with sandy soils of granite origin, which are common in most communal areas. Cereal crops planted in such soils, in particular maize, will have poor to no yields at all in the current season. The highest yields will be found in loamy, heavier soils with good drainage. Even unfertilized lands with such soils had some good crops around mid-February 2006. Such soils are not confined to one geographic area but are found in varying extents throughout the country. Consequently, areas of good harvest will be more diffused throughout the country than in the past years when rainfall was poor.

Figure 3: Crop Water Requirements for February 21, 2006, projected to end of season



It is against this background that the preliminary indications of maize production this year are for improved maize production compared to last year's estimate of 550,000 MT¹, but well below the 1990's average, and well below national consumption requirements. Zimbabwe's 2006 annual maize requirements for human consumption are estimated at 1,420,000 MT based on the HIV/AIDS adjusted population projection of 11,830,000 people². Maize requirements for animal feeds, other industrial processes and provisions for losses collectively estimated at between 200,000 and 300,000 MT put the total 2006 national requirements at between 1,600,000 and 1,700,000 MT.

While the tobacco production prospects are poor, the cotton production estimates coming from the cotton industry are very positive. Preliminary estimates of cotton production are at 420,000 MT, about 14 percent more than last season's cotton production. The 1990s average cotton production was about 225,000 MT/year. Since the majority of cotton growers are in the communal and resettlement farming areas, income from the crop is likely to improve cash incomes in these farming areas. Therefore if food is available on the market at reasonable prices, a significant number of households will have the means of purchasing it.

Limited water and grazing in parts of Manicaland, Matabeleland South and Masvingo provinces (the red circles in the figure 3) is threatening livestock production. Livestock plays a very important role in the livelihoods of the majority of households in these areas, and a threat to livestock production easily translates to increased vulnerability of the population to food insecurity.

¹ USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

²Zimbabwe Central Statistical Office Population Census Office