

Late rainfall spells low crop yields, says dept

Pretoria - Government has warned that crop yields are estimated to be low for this year, as compared to last year.

Winter rains delayed



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This is due to late rains in some summer-rainfall areas during the 2014/15 summer season and the very dry conditions that were experienced during January and February 2015 which affected crop production in some parts of the country.

These conditions mostly affected rain-fed farmers, rather than those farming under irrigation.

Rainfall in the winter-rainfall areas also appears to be delayed for the 2015 winter season and this may affect planting negatively, particularly over the western regions, said the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

The levels at major dams are above 60% in most provinces.

"Drought has been reported in KwaZulu-Natal throughout the summer. While crops have been adversely affected and the veld has deteriorated up to date, livestock remains in reasonable to good condition," said the department

The latest report by the Famine Early Warning System Network indicates that most countries across the region experienced poor seasonal rainfall characterised by a late start of the season, prolonged dry spells from mid-January through April, poorly distributed rains and flooding.

State of cereal production

Significant decreases in cereal production are expected in South Africa and in the southern parts of Zimbabwe, Malawi, Madagascar and Lesotho.

Despite the estimated below-average maize harvests across the region, particularly in the region's biggest cereal surplus producing countries - South Africa and Zambia - regional cereal supplies are likely to remain stable from April to September due to significant carryover stock from last year in both South Africa and Zambia.

Forecasts for rain and tempratures

The Seasonal Climate Watch report released by the South Africa Weather Service on 22 May says the forecasting system indicates above-normal rainfall conditions for most parts of the country, even though relatively low probabilities throughout mid and late winter.

Moving towards early spring, there is still an indication of above-normal rainfall, although the forecast is more uncertain.

Above-normal temperatures are anticipated across the country through mid-winter towards early spring, with the exception of the mid-winter maximum temperatures that is forecasted to be below-normal.

The department said farmers are encouraged to continually check weather updates through the seasonal forecasts and utilise the seven-day weather forecasts for short-term planning.

"Farmers are advised to conserve water and other resources in accordance with the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act. Water restrictions should also be adhered to when issued," it added.

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