



AGROMETEOROLOGICAL UPDATE



REPORTING PERIOD:
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HIGHLIGHTS

- Improved rainfall in parts of the country but still below average...
- **Vegetation continues to deteriorate in the Lowveld....**
- **Some farmers have started land preparation & planting in Highveld....**
- Reduced rainfall is expected in the next dekad countrywide...
- Above average temperatures forecasted in most parts.....
- Continued decline in soil moisture expected.....
- **About 20,000 cattle reported to have died in the Lowveld so far.....**

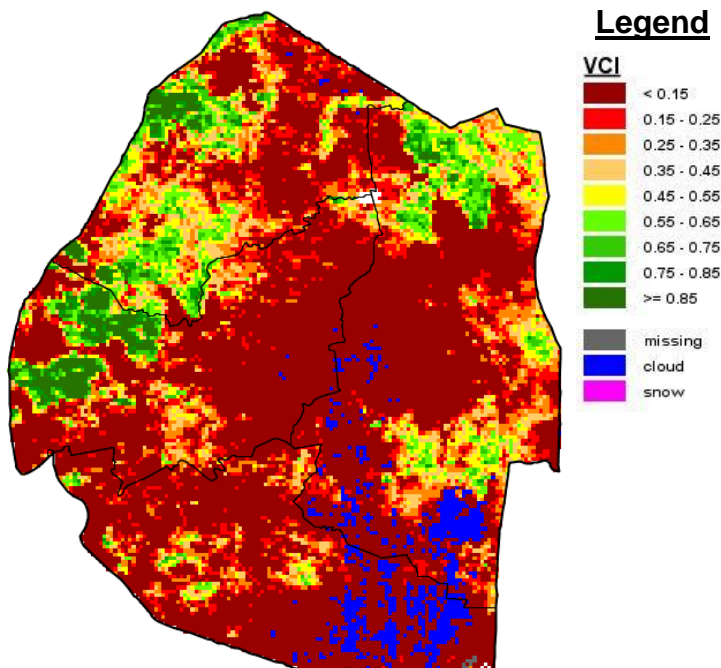


Image 1: Vegetation Condition Index image (1st Dekad December 2015)
Source: *FAO-GIEWS*

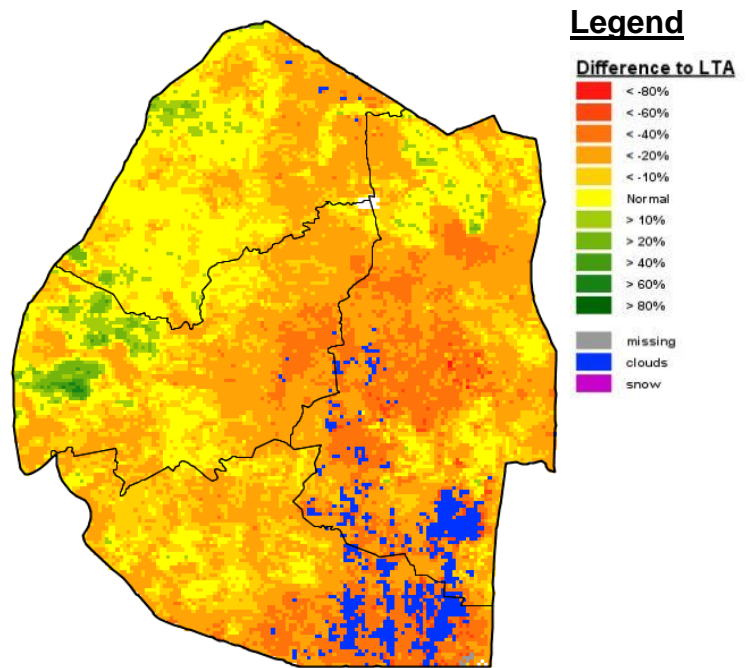


Image 2: Vegetation anomaly image (1st Dekad December 2015)
Source: *FAO-GIEWS*

MOISTURE AND HEAT STATUS

Rainfall

Much improved rains fell during the first dekad of December 2015 (Figure 1), but remains slightly below the long-term rainfall and that of last season (2014/15).

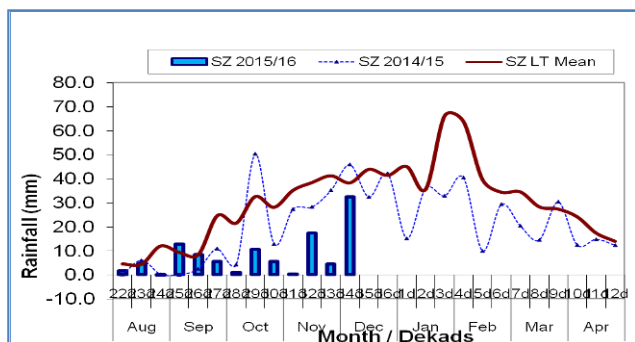
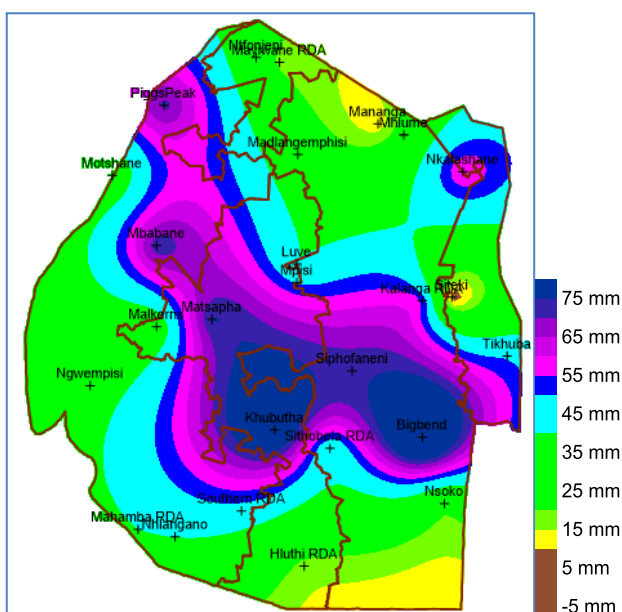


Figure 1: Rainfall distribution as of December 2015



Map 1: Spatial rainfall distribution for first dekad December 2015

Spatial distribution of rainfall for the first dekad of December (Map 1) shows as spread of a total of more than 50mm, stretching from Bigbend through Mafutseni, Khubutha, Matsapha to

Mbabane and Piggs Peak. The rest of the country received totals below 30mm, with areas around Mananga, Siteki and Lavumisa recording almost zero rainfall.

The Lubombo plateau and Highveld were the only agro-zones that recorded below average rainfall during the reporting period (Table 1).

Table 1: Rainfall (mm) for 1st dekad December 2015

	HV	MV	LV	LP
2014/15	112	33	23	15
Average	54	39	30	30
2015/16	31	39	33	27
Anomaly	-23	0	3	-3

Temperatures

Hot temperatures recorded by all stations in the country as all records were above longterm average (Table 2).

Table 2: Temperatures (°C) for 1st Dekad December 2015

Station	Element	1 st dek Dec	Mean	Depart
Mbabane	Max	NR	27.6	NR
	Min	18.2	16.7	1.5
Piggs Peak	Max	28.7	28.0	0.7
	Min	18.2	17.4	0.8
Matsapha	Max	31.8	28.6	3.2
	Min	20.6	17.6	2.9
Malkerns	Max	30.7	27.8	2.9
	Min	19.6	16.5	3.1
Siteki	Max	31.9	28.7	3.2
	Min	19.1	18.6	0.5
Bigbend	Max	33.4	29.2	4.2
	Min	22.4	18.6	3.8
Mananga	Max	34.9	29.1	5.8
	Min	23.5	18.7	4.7

CROP STATUS

Maize Crop Stage and Condition

It has been observed that an increased

number of farmers have been engaged in land preparation (Picture 1) with others already having planted their maize crop especially in some parts of the Middleveld and Highveld. The numbers are still on the lower side.



Picture 1: Ploughed fields at Ntfontjeni area in the Hhohho Region

Other Crops

No other crops have been detected during field visits yet.

Current Farming Activity

Farmers in the Highveld continue with land preparation albeit nervously while very few have planted maize.

VEGETATION AND LIVESTOCK.

The continued deterioration of vegetation in the Lowveld (**Image 2**) has rendered grazing areas in the zone useless as more cattle are seen grazing along roads. This is because whenever there is slight rain, the water that drains from the road support grass growth along the road.

This poor grazing areas have resulted in an increase in the cattle death toll from 14,000 to about 20,000 (***Times of Swaziland, 1st December 2015***). This has left subsistence cattle farmers without

savings to cater for school fees and a cushion food security.

WATER SITUATION

Water shortages continue to worsen as some households in the capital city Mbabane have had their supply rationed by the Swaziland Water Service Corporation as means to address the dire impacts of El Nino drought on their reservoir at Hawane Dam.



Picture 2: State of Hawane Dam captured during the Deputy Prime Minister's tour of the dam

Outlook for 15 - 25 December 2015

Rainfall

Reduced rainfall expected in the forecast period.

Temperature

Above average temperatures anticipated during the outlook period.

Soil Moisture

Decline in soil moisture forecasted for the outlook period.

CONTRIBUTORS, PARTNERS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Please Note: *This bulletin is issued in support of the efforts by the National Early Warning Office (NEWU) for food Security in the Ministry of Agriculture to provide Swaziland's current agronomic and meteorological developments to users, stakeholders, government authorities and international organizations during the farming season.*

The NEWS is currently made-up of a core team of the National Early Warning Unit (NEWU) of Ministry of Agriculture, the Advisory Unit of the National Meteorology Department and the Agricultural Statistics Unit of Central Statistics Office (CSO).