

SWAZILAND



AGROMETEOROLOGICAL UPDATE



REPORTING PERIOD:
01 – 10 MARCH 2006

ISSUE No.: 16

SEASON: 2005/06

RELEASED: 14/03/2006

HIGHLIGHTS

- Impressive rains persist in most parts of the country...
- Mild temperatures recorded in the Highveld...
- Vegetation is in a very good state...
- Maize crop maturing and in a good condition...
- Impressive rains expected.....
- Warm temperatures anticipated.....
- Soil moisture levels to increase....
- Maize yields indicate a decline in production...

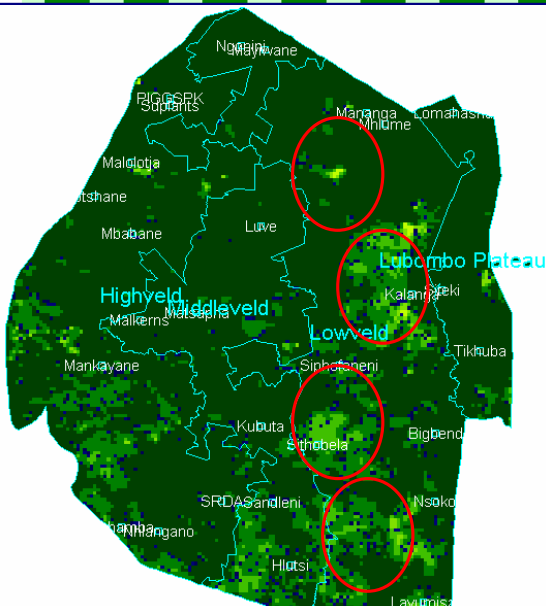


Image 1: Vegetation status as of 3rd dekad February 2006

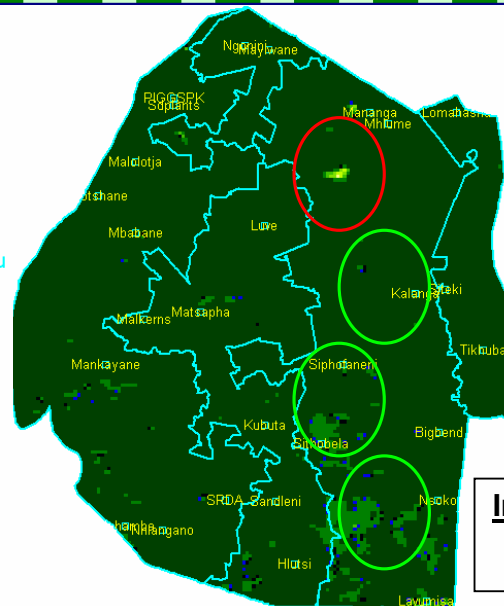


Image 2: Vegetation status as of 1st dekad March 2006

Legend

- ☐ Clouds
- ☐ Water Bodies
- ☐ Bare Soil
- ☐ Almost Bare Soil
- ☐ Initial Vegetation
- ☐ Mode Vegetation
- ☐ Good Vegetation
- ☐ Healthy Vegetation
- ☐ Plantations

Image Pixel Reso

1km by 1km

MOISTURE AND HEAT STATUS

Rainfall

Impressive rains continue to fall in most parts of the country except for the southern parts of the country, where as little as a total of 15 mm was recorded in some weather stations. Most parts of the country received much above average rains during the dekad (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Rainfall analysis for the 01-10 March 2006 period

Station	1 st dek March	Avg	Diff	Percent
Mbabane	137.1	51.5	85.6	166%
Nhlangano	15.3	21.9	-6.6	-30%
Malkerns	89.5	28.8	60.7	211%
Matsapha	50.7	29	21.7	75%
Siteki	75.5	24	51.5	215%

Temperature

Mild temperatures were measured in most parts of the country, especially in the Highveld and Middleveld (**Table 1**) while the Lowveld recorded warm temperatures.

Table 2: Temperature data analysis for 01 - 10 March 2006

Station	Element	1 st dek March	Average	Depart
Mbabane	Max	22.1	27.37	-5.3
	Min	13.5	16.43	-2.9
Nhlangano	Max	23.4	27.77	-4.4
	Min	13.6	16.57	-3.0
Matsapha	Max	25.8	28.47	-2.7
	Min	16.8	17.33	-0.5
Malkerns	Max	25.1	27.57	-2.5
	Min	16.1	16.23	-0.2
Siteki	Max	25.4	28.67	-3.3
	Min	17.3	18.33	-1.0

CROP STATUS

Maize Crop Stage and Condition

Most of the country's crop is maturing with the Lowveld crop already mature and drying (**Picture 1**). The Highveld, Middleveld and Lubombo Plateau's crop is mainly in the soft to hard milk dough stages (**Picture 2**) with a few crops already drying.

There are a few crops which were planted after the January rains which were found to be ranging from mid-to-late vegetative stages. The condition of these crops is very good. Poor management of the crop has been observed in some parts of the country where farmers failed to deal with weeds effectively or did not thin their crop in time and are now failing to form cobs (**Picture 3**).

Other Crops

Sorghum is also maturing in most parts of the Middleveld and drying in the Lowveld. Cotton is mostly in mid-vegetative stages in areas where it was found to be planted.

Current Farming Activity

A few farmers were found to be weeding their already mature crops in a bid to enhance air flow and absorption of Plant Available Radiation (PAR).

MAIZE PRODUCTION FORECAST

The 2005/06 maize production forecast points towards a slight increase compared to that of last season (**Table 2**). The country's maize production forecast will be issued once the area planted to maize is available from the Central Statistics Unit (CSO)

Table 3: WRSI and yield forecasts as of 01 - 10 March 2006

Eco_Zone	Curr WRSI	Yield (t/ha)	harvest WRSI	Yield (t/ha)
Highveld	93	1.875	88	1.6676
Middleveld	94	1.5904	89	1.4747
Lowveld	70	0.8125	61	0.6979
Lubombo	89	1.3499	89	1.3499
National	87	1.4070	82	1.2975

VEGETATION AND LIVESTOCK

Vegetation continues to be in a good state as rains continue to fall consistently throughout the past dekads. An improvement from that of last dekads' status is also noted (*Image 1 and 2*), signifying a positive response (*red to green circles*) to the good rains that have fallen so far.

Livestock especially cattle were found to be doing very well countrywide as their pasture are all in good vegetative state. Water for livestock drinking is also sufficient as most rivers and to a certain extent streams have had remarkable increases in their water levels.

Outlook for 15 – 24 March 2006

Rainfall

Persistence of the current good rains is expected during the forecast period, though slightly decreasing towards the end.

Temperature

Mild-to-Warm temperatures can be expected during the first half of the outlook period getting warmer in the second part.

Soil Moisture

An insignificant increase in soil moisture is expected as a result of the slight decrease in expected rains during the forecast period.



Picture 1: Mature and drying maize crop in the Lowveld



Picture 2: Milk dough stage maize cob at the Lubombo Plateau



Picture 3: Poorly managed cobbing maize crops in some parts of the Plateau (needs thinning)

Vote of thanks to our:

CONTRIBUTORS, PARTNERS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Please Note: *This bulletin is issued in support of the efforts by the National Early Warning System (NEWS) to provide Swaziland's current cropping and meteorological developments to users, stakeholders, government authorities and international organizations during the farming season.*

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