

Title:

South African corn and small grains

Word Count:

576

Summary:

South Africa has a very diverse rainfall, allowing many fruits, vegetables and crops to grow throughout the country, all year round. Crops are just one of South Africa's most important production of food, not only to South Africans, but also the rest of Africa.

Keywords:

South Africa, crops, maize, information on South Africa

Article Body:

South Africa has a very diverse rainfall, allowing many fruits, vegetables and crops to grow throughout the country, all year round. Crops are just one of South Africa's most important production of food, not only to South Africans, but also the rest of Africa. Of South Africa's total cultivated area (approximately 10 million hectors), around 36% is planted with maize and 21% has small grains. Oil seeds, sorghum, maize and small grains covers around two thirds of the total arable land.

The most important grain crop for South Africa and the rest of Africa is maize. Maize is a dietary staple for humans, a source of livestock feed and is also used in the production of other foods. Maize is the largest locally produced field crop and is a great source of carbohydrates to both humans and animals. South Africans produce around 8 million metric tons of mealies per year (depending on the rainfall), consumes around 7.5 million metric tons and exports the surplus to countries like Lesotho and Swaziland. More than 600 million metric tons of maize is produced per year world-wide (varies every year).

Mealies are cold-intolerant and therefor need to be planted during the spring season. Its root system is generally shallow, so the plant depends on soil moisture. Mealies are planted during the month of November in South Africa and harvested around March. Because maize is most sensitive to drought, you never know how the crop will do until you see how much it rains. The rains in the summer rainfall area only start around December, so it is difficult to predict if it will rain. Maize is planted before this time, so you have to hope and pray it rains. More than 50% of water in South Africa is used for agricultural

purposes.

Grain is the second most important crop and produced in the winter rainfall areas of Western Cape and summer rainfall areas of the North West, Northern Province and the Free State. Free State is currently the highest producer of grain but there are annual fluctuations. Western Cape is the most stable production area due to the more dependable rainfall. It is usually grown during the frost-free season.

Sorghum is another very important grain for South Africa and is cultivated in the drier parts of the summer rainfall areas of Free State as well as in the North-West with yields often exceeding 200 000 tons. Sorghum is slender with leafy stems and grows up to 3 meters high on a variety of soils in areas with around 600 mm of rain per year. It is drought and heat tolerant and cultivated primarily for hay. An average temperature of around 25°C produces maximum grain yields in a given year.

Sorghum is native to Southern Africa and has been used since prehistoric times for food as well as brewing purposes. This is also used in packaging materials for sensitive equipment and is made into excellent wallboards for house building.

Lucerne seed is also very important and is mainly produced in Oudtshoorn, De Rust and Douglas. Oudtshoorn alone is responsible for around 90% of the lucerne seed produced in South Africa today. Around 100 to 120 lucerne bales per hectare can be produced every three weeks, as long as enough water is available. Make sure lucerne is planted during the rainfall season.

South Africa produces a large variety of crops, fruit and vegetables and is able to provide in their people's needs, with enough remaining to export high quality produce to the international market.