Agricultural policy, production status, and trade volumes nexus in Zimbabwe: the case of selected cereal crops

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Abstract:

Zimbabwe is predominantly an agrarian country. Farming is the major source of livelihood and income for over 50% of all the country's citizens. Agriculture also contributes 18% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. It contributes significantly as a source of raw materials, food security, employment, foreign exchange earnings, and human and capital formation. This research aims to provide an overview of the nexus between agricultural policy, status of production, and trade volumes, with a focus on cereal crops (wheat and sorghum) in Zimbabwe. It is informed by the Diffusion and Innovation Theory, the Marginal Zone Theory, Planned Behaviour Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory, which link with agricultural development in the country. The study follows a descriptive qualitative methodology, where the researchers made use of published data from local and international data sources to conduct an analysis of the nexus between agricultural policy, status of production, and the trade volumes in the country. The study draws from secondary literature in both grey and academic formats. It also utilizes government reports and documents. The study shows that among the small grain category, the selected cereals are increasingly becoming important as they form part of the staple food basket in the country. The recent government focus on small grains is making a significant impact on their production. The study identifies leading agricultural policies in the country and infers their effect on production and trade volumes. The study further shows that due to the lack of resources to develop its economy in other sectors, Zimbabwe has focused on agriculture to develop itself. It concludes that farming with a focus on cereal production will continue to dominate the economy for many years to come.

Keywords: Agriculture, capital, cereals, endowments, international trade.

Introduction

Most parts of Zimbabwe have environments that are conducive to the production of crops and animal farming (Ngwenya, Lunga & van Eeden, 2022). As such, since independence in 1980, the country has endeavoured to formulate agricultural policies that foster increased production in the agriculture sector, with the surplus being exported. Any deficit would be catered for by imports (ZEPARU, 2021). The agricultural products produced include maize, wheat, sorghum, millet, beef, poultry, dairy, sugar, and horticultural products, among others. According to Nhamo,

Mathcaya, Mabhaudhi, Nhlengethwa, Nhemachena, & Mpandeli (2019), cereal crops in Zimbabwe form the staple food and, as such, have special treatment in terms of their production and trade. They need to be regulated to ensure food security in the country. Maize, as one of the main cereal crops, is a staple food crop grown and consumed by people with varying food preferences and socio-economic backgrounds in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is one major producers of cereal crops in SADC with substantial cereal volumes traded across the region. Zimbabwe, even though hit by droughts in 1981/2 and 1992, managed to be a net exporter of maize up to around 1998 (Rukuni & Tawonezvi, 2006; Ngwenya, Lunga & van Eeden, 2022). In order to enhance the production of cereals, Zimbabwe has adopted various agricultural policies since independence in 1980, so as to meet local consumption and export requirements (SADC, 2018; Ray & Schaffer, 2016).

In the wheat sector, Zimbabwe has been doing well as it produced 12,000 tonnes in 2009, which increased to 38,715 tonnes in 2017. However, due to high demand, imports have been going up from 243,139 tonnes in 2009 to 268,892 tonnes in 2017. Subsequent years have seen production going up. For instance, production went up to 300,000 tonnes in the 2023 production season (Nyandoro & Anderson, 2025). Sorghum production has also shown upward trends. For example, production rose from 70,000 tonnes in 2009 to 137,000 tonnes in 2014. Despite poor yields of 40,000 and 46,000 tonnes in 2015 and 2016, respectively, production rose to 69,295 tonnes in 2017. Subsequent years show that production has grown to 82,063 tonnes in 2023. Imports have been rising, though (Ngwenya, Lunga & van Eeden, 2022).

The study explored the nexus among the agriculture policies, production status, and trade volumes in Zimbabwe with a focus on wheat and sorghum crops for the period 2009 to 2024. The year 2009 marks the period when the country's economy started recovering from the economic challenges that came with the implementation of the land reform in the country. According to SADC (2018) and Ray & Schaffer (2016), this year also marks the beginning of the Government of National Unity that was credited with the implementation of various reforms and policies that propped up the economy from the downward trend that accelerated from the early 2000s. Wheat and sorghum, among the cereal crop sector, are important in Zimbabwe. Their significance stems from the focus of the Government of Zimbabwe on their production.

Zimbabwe has been implementing various agricultural policies since its independence. The main and current one is the National Agriculture Policy Framework (NAPF) of 2018-2030, supported by various programmes that include the Presidential Input Support Scheme and the Command Agriculture Programme. Despite these policies, production has been fluctuating, and this has been affecting trade volumes too, resulting in Zimbabwe being a net importer of cereal crops (World Bank, 2024). Given this background, the research problem lies in understanding the complex relationship between Zimbabwe's agricultural policies, wheat and sorghum production, and trade volumes from 2009 to 2024. The study focuses on identifying and evaluating the major agricultural policies in Zimbabwe, their effect on the production of cereals (wheat and sorghum crops), and the subsequent trade volumes. Wheat and sorghum are staple crops. They have economic importance and are drought resilient to some extent (Sithole & Olorunfemi, 2024). The focus on wheat and sorghum is motivated by the little attention (unlike maize) given to them by scholars in terms of production and trade in Zimbabwe (Kaponda & Chiwaridzo, 2024). Therefore, the proper

formulation of policies concerning the production and trade of these crops would ensure the country's food security.

Literature review

Zimbabwe's cereal production policies have aimed to enhance food security and agricultural productivity, but face challenges related to input access, market distortions, trade, and climate variability. Zimbabwe has implemented various policies that govern the agricultural sector from production to marketing the produce. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (2023), the main policies include the National Agriculture Policy Framework (NAPF) of 2018-2030, the Presidential Input Support Scheme, and the Command Agriculture Programme. These are in addition to earlier policies that include the Willing Buyer, Willing Seller Settlement Programme (1980), the Liberalised Policies (1991), Land Acquisition and Fast Track Land Reform Programme (2000), the Mixed Approach under Zimasset Food Security and Nutrition Cluster (2013) and Comprehensive Agricultural Policy (2012)), National Agriculture Policy Framework 2018-2030, Zimbabwe Agriculture Input Policy 2017-2021, and Zimbabwe Agricultural Growth Programme 2016-2023.

These policies aim to transform the agricultural sector by increasing production and competitiveness (World Bank, 2024). They focus on various key areas such as food and nutrition security, agricultural knowledge, technology and innovation, production and supply of agricultural inputs, development of agriculture infrastructure, agricultural marketing and trade development, agricultural finance and credit, access, tenure security and land administration, and sustainable agriculture. The whole purpose is to ensure food security in the country, and Zimbabwe has, to a large extent, managed to achieve that goal over the years.

According to Mpala & Simatele (2023), these policies generally outline strategies for agricultural development. However, inconsistencies in input and output markets, as well as the impact of climate change, have affected both production and trade volumes. Various government and donor-funded schemes have created distortions in the input market, making it difficult for private dealers to be the main source of inputs for small-scale producers (Lima & Lessard, 2023). The sector also has inconsistent marketing and trade policies hindering efficient grain distribution. In addition, according to WFP (2023), the sector has suffered inconsistencies in policy implementation and a lack of coordination between different stakeholders. Climate change has also been a hindrance to the proper implementation of the policies, as droughts that have been experienced over the years resulted in change to policies and this affected yields and hence, trade volumes. As a result, the country became a net importer of cereals to cover the food requirement gaps.

Agriculture contribution

Erenstein et al. (2022) assert that agriculture is an important source of raw materials for other industries such as textiles. The multiplier effects of increased agricultural production and income become more important due to the increased demand for industrial output and the associated demand for labour and other inputs. Also, the domestic agricultural sector is the principal source of food for non-agriculture workers in the country. For economic diversification to be successful,

domestic food producers should produce a surplus. It also contributes to employment. Labour force in agriculture is approximately 26,4 %, making it a significant contributor to the reduction of unemployment levels (FAO, 2025; Chinsinga & Chasukwa, 2018).

Agriculture also contributes to foreign currency reserves (GoZ, 2024). This is the case as most cash crops are exported and bring in foreign currency. In addition, food sufficiency has reduced dependence on imports, hence saving foreign currency to be used in other areas of need. It also contributes to physical capital. Capital is required for the creation of off-farm jobs and provision of supportive facilities which improve the productive life of capital and efficiency of its utilisation. The three main sources of capital are foreign direct investment, aid, and domestic supply, mainly from agriculture. Therefore, agriculture is a significant sector in the economy of Zimbabwe.

Apart from Zimbabwe, other countries in the region have also taken an active role in propping up their agricultural sector by implementing policies so as to increase production, and either increase exports or reduce imports of the cereals (IMF, 2024). The importance of the agricultural sector in Africa in contributing to food security is reflected in how it is prioritized in the development agenda (World Bank, 2024). For example, Malawi and Mozambique have a majority of their population also reliant upon agriculture (World Bank, 2019). Agriculture remains the backbone of Malawi's economy, contributing approximately 30% to the national GDP (World Bank, 2024). Agricultural exports contribute significantly to foreign exchange (FAO, 2020). In Mozambique, agriculture also plays a significant role, contributing approximately 26-30% to the national GDP, and employing over 70% of the population, mainly in rural areas (World Bank, 2023). Most of the agriculture in Mozambique is for subsistence, and as a result, it remains a net importer of food.

Zambia's cereal policy primarily focuses on supporting maize production due to its status as the main staple food in the country. The government has implemented programmes like the Farmer Input Support Programme and the Food Reserve Agency to support farmers (SADC, 2023). There is also a growing emphasis on diversifying crops and promoting sustainable agricultural practices to improve food security and nutrition. Overall, cereal policy in Zambia is evolving to address the complexities of food security, nutrition, and sustainable agricultural practices, while also recognising the importance of maize as the dominant staple (FAO, 2025).

South African agriculture is highly diversified with both crop and livestock production (FAO, 2025). It is a major producer and net importer of wheat and wheat products (SADC, 2023). Just like Zimbabwe, the Government of South Africa adopted various agricultural policies to transform the production and trade of agricultural commodities locally, regionally, and internationally. Most of these policies proved to be a success to a great extent (UNECA, 2023). This makes South Africa an agricultural success story in Southern Africa.

Importance of cereals in Zimbabwe

Cereal crops are an important ingredient of the food basket of Zimbabwe, and thus have important policy implications (Anseeuw et al, 2012). Investigations surrounding these crops assist in the formulation of appropriate food security legislation governing their trade (Sarris & Morrison, 2010). It is therefore important to understand the effect of agricultural policy on cereals. Cereals play an important role in food security and rural livelihoods in the country. The main crops in the cereals category grown in Zimbabwe include maize, wheat, sorghum, millets, and rice. The economic benefits of the crops include income generation, employment creation for the agriculture sector and its value chain, and contribution to foreign currency reserves.

Zimbabwe's agricultural policies, particularly those related to land reform and grain market control, have had a significant impact on cereal production and trade (Lima & Lessard, 2023). Land redistribution, while aiming for equity, led to disruptions in large-scale commercial farming, while market liberalisation, though intended to boost private sector involvement, initially struggled with input costs and access to markets. According to Nyandoro & Anderson (2025), the land reform implemented in the early 2000s saw the redistribution of land from large-scale commercial farms to smallholder farmers. While it was intended to promote more equitable land ownership and agricultural production, the land reform resulted in a decline in overall cereal production, particularly maize, due to disruptions in farming practices, lack of experience among new settlers, and limited access to inputs and finance. The government had to intervene so as to mitigate the devastating effects (Dube, 2020). The policy interventions further created a complex and often unstable environment for cereal production and trade.

Importance of wheat and sorghum in Zimbabwe

According to Nyandoro & Anderson (2025), wheat plays an important role in the economy of Zimbabwe. It contributes to food security, where it forms a significant part of the staple food basket. The country's production of the crop aims to feed about 10 million of the population, the greater part of the population being in the urban areas of the country. The cereal crop also contributes about 4% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (IMF, 2024). This makes it a significant crop for the economy of the country. Wheat production provides employment and income to those involved in its production and value chain. Therefore, it plays an important role as a source of livelihood for many people. It has also contributed to food self-sufficiency in the country (Chidoko, 2022). This has been a result of government support in its production in terms of funding and policies.

Despite the importance of wheat production, it has faced various challenges. Climate change has affected progress in agriculture in general (UNECA, 2023). This has also affected the availability of adequate water for irrigation, especially during winter crop seasons. These challenges have affected the quality of the crop. According to SADC (2021), the Government of Zimbabwe and other stakeholders are playing a significant role in urging innovation and adaptation strategies so as to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change in the agricultural sector in general.

In addition, sorghum, being a small grain crop, has also received more focus in the ongoing small grain promotional campaign by the Government of Zimbabwe (Lima & Lessard, 2023). Like other cereal crops, sorghum contributes significantly to food security. It is a staple food in most parts of the country, mostly in the drylands where its production is dominant. It is also more drought-tolerant than most cereals, and it is a significant crop for dryland agriculture, ensuring food security in areas of adverse weather and climatic conditions (Dube, 2020).

Sorghum is important as it has many uses, besides being a staple food. It is used as animal feed, especially for cattle and poultry. It is also used in industry, where it is processed into industrial products such as ethanol, glucose, and starch. It is also mostly known for its use in beer brewing, both traditional and commercial production (Nyandoro & Anderson, 2025). Sorghum is also a nutritious grain, particularly rich in carbohydrates, protein, fiber, and several vitamins and minerals. It is a good source of energy and can contribute to various aspects of health (Chinsinga & Chasukwa, 2018). As such, it is a source of income to farmers and all those involved in its value chain. Therefore, sorghum is important as a source of food, income, and industrial development in the country.

Theories underpinning Agricultural Development in Southern Africa

Agricultural policies, production status, and trade volumes are interconnected through complex relationships. As such, generally policies influence production levels, which in turn affect trade flows, be they exports or imports (Lima & Lessard, 2023). Subsidies, price controls, and trade restrictions in Zimbabwe have shown that they distort production decisions, leading to surpluses or shortages, thereby ultimately impacting international trade patterns. On the other hand, changes in production, such as increased output due to technological advancements or adverse weather events, such as the current climate change being experienced in the country, have influenced trade volumes and necessitated agricultural policy adjustments (Nyandoro & Anderson, 2025).

In Zimbabwe, various theories that try to explain production and productivity in agriculture can be cited. The main theories include the Diffusion and Innovation Theory, the Marginal Zone Theory, the Planned Behaviour Theory, and the Social Cognitive Theory. According to Chamunorwa, Sakadzo & Kugedera (2021), the Zimbabwean government has implemented several programmes aimed at boosting agricultural production, in line with the propositions of the given four theories.

The Theory of Diffusion and Innovation explains the spread of new agricultural technologies within a population. It explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technologies spread through a population. In the context of agriculture, this theory describes how new farming techniques, equipment, or practices are adopted by farmers over time. The characteristics of the innovation, the communication channels used to spread information, and the characteristics of the adopters are considered factors that influence the adoption of innovations (Chamunorwa et al, 2021).

The other theory is the Marginal Zone Theory. It is primarily applied in archaeology and biology. In archaeology, it suggests that agriculture arose in areas where hunting and gathering became unsustainable, forcing populations to adopt new subsistence strategies. In biology, specifically within the spleen, the marginal zone is a critical area for immune responses, where immune cells

interact and filter blood-borne antigens. According to Lima & Lessard (2023), this theory attributes the nexus between agriculture and development to population pressure and environmental changes. According to the theory, agriculture is a result of the response to cyclical population pressure on the edges of previously well-populated areas. Humans initially existed in equilibrium with their environment. Population growth and environmental disruptions resulted in people moving to less favourable areas. In the marginal zones, the invention of agriculture restored equilibrium through the provision of a more reliable food supply (Chamunorwa et al, 2021).

The other theories that explain agricultural production are the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The TPB and SCT are both influential frameworks in social psychology used to understand and predict human behaviour. However, TPB focuses on how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence intentions and subsequent behavior, while SCT places more emphasis on the interplay between personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior itself, highlighting concepts like self-efficacy and observational learning (Chinsinga & Chasukwa, 2018). According to the theories, farmers' attitudes, beliefs, and social influences influence the adoption of new technologies and practices. The Theory of Planned Behaviour suggests that an individual's intentions to perform a behaviour are influenced by their attitudes toward the behaviour and their perceptions of social norms. Social Cognitive Theory highlights the interplay between individual cognitive processes, social interactions, and the environment in shaping behaviour (Chamunorwa et al, 2021).

Dube (2020) asserts that in Zimbabwe, agricultural development is intricately linked to various models, where the country presents opportunities for diverse approaches, including large-scale commercial farming and smallholder systems, each having its own challenges and potentials. Generally, by applying the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, we can see how agricultural policies (the social system) influence the adoption of new farming practices (the innovation) by farmers (the members) and how this affects production and trade. Furthermore, the Marginal Zone Theory, which posits that agriculture expanded into less productive areas due to population growth, can be applied to understand Zimbabwe's agricultural landscape (Chamunorwa et al, 2021). In Zimbabwe, this manifests as a complex interplay between agricultural policies, production status (including both commercial and smallholder farming), and trade volumes, particularly in the context of land reform and market access challenges. Also, the Theories of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) can be valuable frameworks for understanding how agricultural policies impact production and trade in Zimbabwe. Applying these theories can help explain why farmers adopt certain practices, how policies influence those practices, and ultimately affect production and trade volumes.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive qualitative methodology. In order to identify a robust set of agricultural policies that have enhanced the status of agriculture in Zimbabwe, the focus was mainly on the following sub-areas:

- *Leading agricultural policies in Zimbabwe.*
- *Production levels (Wheat and Sorghum crops)*
- *Trade volumes (Wheat and sorghum)*

The aim is to unpack the nexus between agricultural policies in Zimbabwe, production levels, and trade volumes.

Research Design: The study used a descriptive qualitative methodology. The research made use of secondary data, which is data published by international data sources, to do an analysis of the nexus between agricultural policies in Zimbabwe, production levels, and trade volumes. The study also made use of online reports and articles, and similar documents. In other words, the study made use of online literature and document analysis. Furthermore, it made use of hard copy materials sourced from the officials in the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, at the Ministry's Head Office in Harare. The materials obtained include policy documents, cereal output, and agricultural trade volumes from which trade statistics of wheat and sorghum were obtained. The departments that provided information are the Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services (Agritex), the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA), the Agricultural Rural Development Authority (ARDA), and the Grain Marketing Board (GMB). These are parastatals operating under the ministry's mandate.

The descriptive qualitative methodology was suitable for exploring the complex interplay between agricultural policies, production levels, and trade because it allows for an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of stakeholders, as well as the contextual factors influencing these relationships (Lima and Lessard, 2023).

Data Collection: Secondary data was obtained from online sources and hard copy material from the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, and Rural Development, and its associated parastatals. The information sourced included policies in place, challenges being faced in the implementation, production, and trade of the cereal crops, focusing mainly on wheat and sorghum.

Data Analysis: A descriptive qualitative analysis was carried out on online material and sourced documents that included historical records and official reports.

Results and discussion

Agricultural policies adopted in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has adopted several agricultural policies since its independence in 1980. The purpose was to boost agricultural output to feed the growing population (GoZ, 2024). These policies include the National Agriculture Policy Framework (NAPF) of 2018-2030, which is supported by various programmes that include the Presidential Input Support Scheme and the Command Agriculture Programme, among others.

The National Agriculture Policy Framework (NAPF) (2018-2030) addresses issues concerning crop and livestock production, marketing, and trade. The framework has been crafted to enhance the country's competitiveness in the world market. Reforms and policies in agriculture are formulated around this framework. Agriculture policies in Zimbabwe do not target specific crops per se, but the whole sector in general. Wheat and sorghum have been singled out to some extent, though, as wheat is targeted for winter cropping, while sorghum is one of the main small grains that are targeted and encouraged to be grown in dryland areas of the country.

Table 1 below gives various policies adopted by the Government of Zimbabwe to boost production and productivity in agriculture.

Table 1: Land and Agriculture policies in Zimbabwe

Policy	Description
Willing buyer, willing seller resettlement programme (1980) High regulation and control policies	The government distributed 2.46 million ha in the first five years to model 12-acre schemes, which became successful. Maintaining the dual agricultural system. Continuation of the pre-independence government controls, with bias towards black small-scale and communal farmers (these received subsidised inputs and protected marketing).
Liberalised policies (1991)	Trade liberalisation begins, founded on the macroeconomic reforms' proposed market-based economy. Abandonment of controls and subsidies, although the grain sector remained partially controlled. The start of efforts to write national agricultural policies.
-Land acquisition and Fast Track Land Reform Programme (2000) -Return of regularisation	Production falls drastically after the FTLRP. All efforts to craft national policy fail, and the government becomes highly involved in trade regulation again. The central bank bankrolls national agricultural projects, and marketing of most produce (cereals are tightly controlled).
Mixed approach	The government partly liberalises agricultural trade again. The grain trade is uncontrolled for the first time. The government and funds input projects to communal and resettled farmers.
Mixed approach (under Zimasset Food Security and Nutrition Cluster (2013) and Comprehensive Agricultural Policy (2012)	The government introduces the Maguta programme. This was also coupled with the Presidential Input scheme during the period (2015) that benefitted 300,000 small-scale farmers from $28 million facility. Diversify cropping patterns at the national level by supporting the production of small grains, especially in the drought-prone areas.
National Agriculture Policy Framework 2018-2030	To create a stable enabling environment and flow of investment that sustainably enhances the capacity of the agricultural sector to anchor national economic growth to upper middle-income status by 2030.
Zimbabwe Agriculture Input Policy 2017-2021	To facilitate a sustainable increase in production, productivity, and competitiveness of Zimbabwean agriculture
Zimbabwe Agricultural Growth Programme - 2016-2023	To contribute to the development of a diversified and efficient agriculture sector that promotes inclusive green economic growth.

Source: Compiled from policy documents from the Ministry of Agriculture, Zimbabwe (2025)

The policies given in Table 1 were meant to increase production for local consumption and export. The Government of Zimbabwe maintained the dual agriculture system it inherited from the colonial period. The emphasis was on small-scale and communal black farmers. It subsidized inputs and offered other supportive initiatives to enhance food sufficiency in the country. The Government's involvement heavily favoured the production of cereal crops that included wheat and sorghum (Ministry of Agriculture, 2025).

In 1990, the Government of Zimbabwe adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). This led to a liberal and market-oriented macroeconomic policy stance according to the World Bank (2024). This affected production as it eliminated subsidies to farmers who were not yet ready to stand on their own feet. Over the years that followed ESAP, production continued to decline. As a result, the Government of Zimbabwe adopted several policies and reforms so as to prop up the country's agricultural sector. The most notable one among these policies and programmes was the Land Acquisition and Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) of 2000. Production fell drastically after the FTLRP. All efforts to craft national policy failed, and the government became highly involved in trade regulation again. The Central Bank bankrolled national agricultural projects, and marketing of most produce (cereals were tightly controlled) (Tshuma, 2014).

Thereafter came the mixed approach period under the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET). This programme enhanced production through its Food Security and Nutrition Cluster (2013) and Comprehensive Agricultural Policy (2012). The government introduced the Maguta programme. This was also coupled with the Presidential Input scheme during the period (2015) that benefitted 300,000 small-scale farmers from a $28 million facility (WFP, 2023). It diversified cropping patterns at the national level through supporting the production of small grains, especially in the drought-prone areas (Dube, 2020).

Later in 2018, the Government came up with the National Agriculture Policy Framework (2018-2030). This was meant to create a stable, enabling environment and flow of investment that sustainably enhances the capacity of the agricultural sector to anchor national economic growth to upper middle-income status by 2030. Dube (2020) asserts that this framework was buttressed by the Zimbabwe Agriculture Input Policy of 2017-2021, which sought to facilitate a sustainable increase in productivity and competitiveness of Zimbabwean agriculture. The Zimbabwe Agricultural Growth Programme (2016-2023) also contributed to the development of a diversified and efficient agriculture sector that promotes inclusive green economic growth.

Cereal production in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe endeavours to boost cereal production through various programmes focusing on climate-smart agriculture, improved farming techniques, and market access for farmers. The efforts are meant to enhance food security in the country (Lima & Lessard, 2023). Through Climate-Smart Agriculture and Resilience, the Government is seized with the Integrated Small Grain Project (which focuses on increasing resilience and productivity of small grains), the Pfumvudza/Intwasa Programme (which aims to improve crop yields), Conservation Agriculture (minimal soil disturbance, crop rotation, and maintaining ground cover), and Drought-Resistant Seed Varieties (which encourages the use of drought-resistant seed varieties).

Furthermore, the Government of Zimbabwe, through Improved Farming Techniques, focuses on multi-crop threshers, which help alleviate the manual labour involved in threshing cereals and expand training and extension services on good agricultural practices. It also works to improve soil fertility management. Also, the Government is seized with market access and value addition in the sector. It implements initiatives that aim to improve farmers' access to markets for the cereal produce, and also explores ways to process small grains into products such as flour (GoZ, 2024).

To enhance the production of wheat and sorghum, Zimbabwe has adopted various agricultural policies since its independence in 1980. These policies were meant to increase production. The surplus would be exported. Table 2 below shows cereals production, consumption, and trade volumes for Zimbabwe in tonnes. Despite low production levels as shown, the agricultural policies have managed to enhance production in the country. The exports are depressed, though, due to high local consumption.

Table 2: Cereals Production, Consumption, and Trade Volumes for Zimbabwe (tonnes)

Year	Production (tonnes)	Consumption	Imports	Exports	Net Export/Import
Wheat					
2009	12,000	255,077	243,139	62	(243,077)
2010	18,000	353,480	335,480	0	(335,480)
2011	23,000	310,705	287,766	61	(287,705)
2012	20,000	205,842	186,955	1,113	(185,842)
2013	25,000	223,101	198,211	110	(18101)
2014	34,250	235,259	201,010	1	(201,009)
2015	20,000	249,783	231,293	1,510	(229,783)
2016	20,000	288,891	268,892	1	(268,891)
2017	38,715	307,606	268,892	1	(268,891)
2018	45,000	153,061	108,068	7	(108061)
2019	94,685	116,002	51,617	300	(51,317)
2020	212,530	313166	102,719	2,083	(100,636)
2021	337,212	417,821	80,609	10	(80.599)
2022	250,000	350484	100,608	124	(100,484)
2023	300,000	424490	124,497	7	(124,490)
Sorghum					
2009	70,000	147,830	77,830	0	(77,830)
2010	73,675	103,740	30,065	0	(30,065)
2011	95,000	118,757	23,757	0	(23,757)
2012	65,000	369,403	3,668	129	(304,403)
2013	69,000	79,134	10,406	272	(101,134)
2014	137,000	142,972	6,011	39	(5,972)
2015	40,000	51,279	11,307	28	(11,279)
2016	46,000	84,780	38,895	115	(38,780)
2017	69,295	108,075	38,895	115	(38,780)

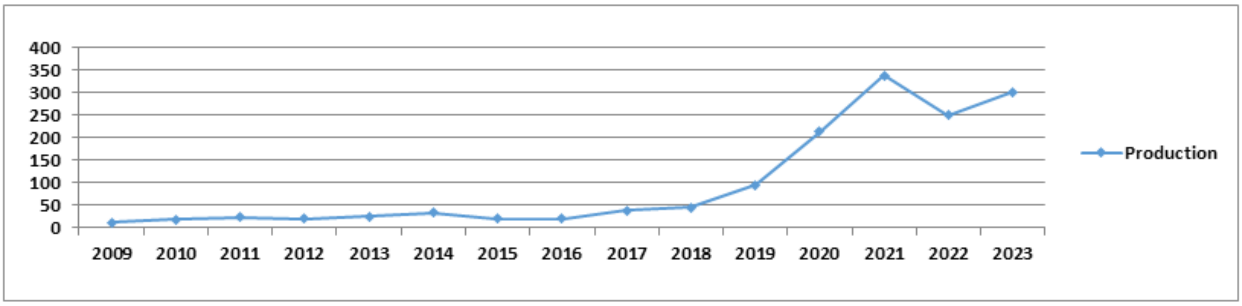
2018	75,324	78067	7,713	4,970	(2,743)
2019	66,280	77,632	18,318	6,966	(11,352)
2020	143,055	162,293	19,318	80	(19,238)
2021	128,907	148,156	19,319	70	(19,249)
2022	78,861	85370	6,729	220	(6,509)
2023	82,063	87436	7,006	1,633	(5,373)

Source: Calculated from FAO Statistics Division data (2025).

Wheat production and trade

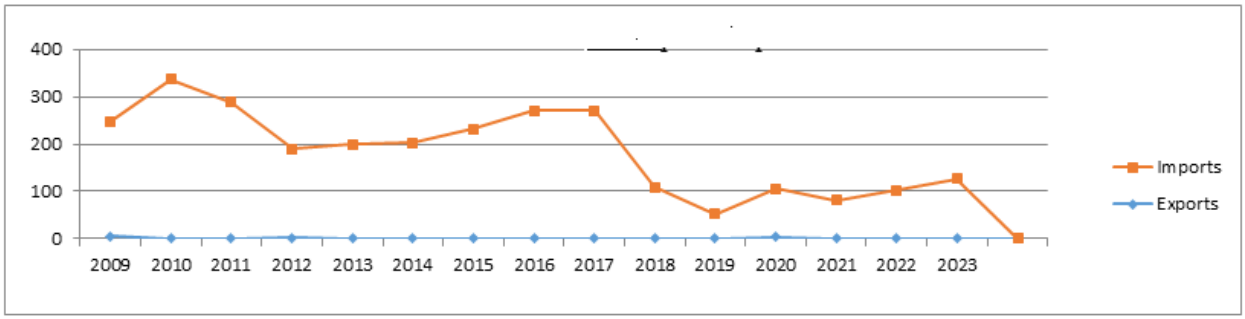
Wheat production in Zimbabwe has been steadily increasing, with the country achieving record harvests in recent years and becoming self-sufficient (Lima and Lessard, 2023). In 2023, Zimbabwe produced approximately 300,000 tonnes of wheat. This success is attributed to various factors, including revamped irrigation schemes, government support, and the adoption of high-yielding varieties. The support by the Government of Zimbabwe is producing tremendous results in the sector. The winter season cropping is also adding immensely to the quantities being produced per year. All these schemes are attributed to the policies that have been implemented to boost the production of the crop. In the wheat sector, Zimbabwe has been doing well, as it produced 12,000 tonnes in 2009 and increased the yield to 38,715 tonnes in 2017. The production levels continued to increase thereafter to 300,000 tonnes in 2023. Due to high demand, imports have been going up from 243,139 tonnes in 2009 to 268,892 tonnes in 2017, until it reached 124,497 tonnes in 2023. The available data shows insignificant figures on exports that declined from 62 tonnes to 7 tonnes over the same period. Figures 1 and 2 show trends of wheat production and trade volumes, respectively.

Figure 1: Zimbabwe wheat production (000) metric tonnes



Source: Constructed using FAO Statistics Division data (2025)

Figure 2: Wheat exports/imports (000) metric tonnes

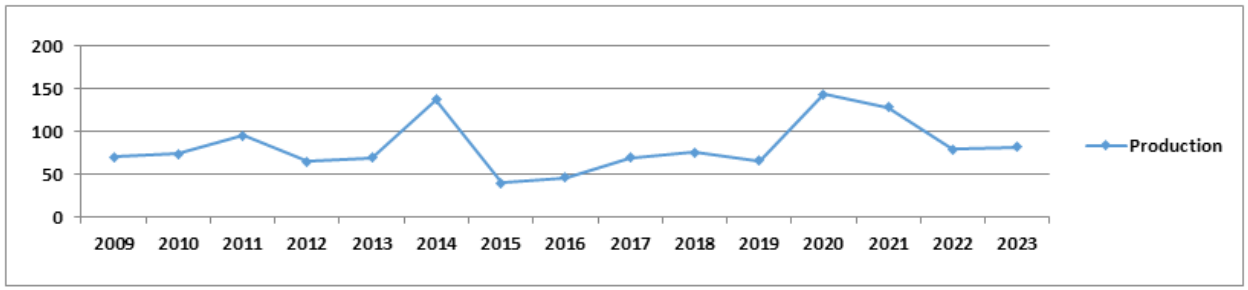


Source: Constructed using FAO Statistics Division data (2025)

Sorghum production and trade

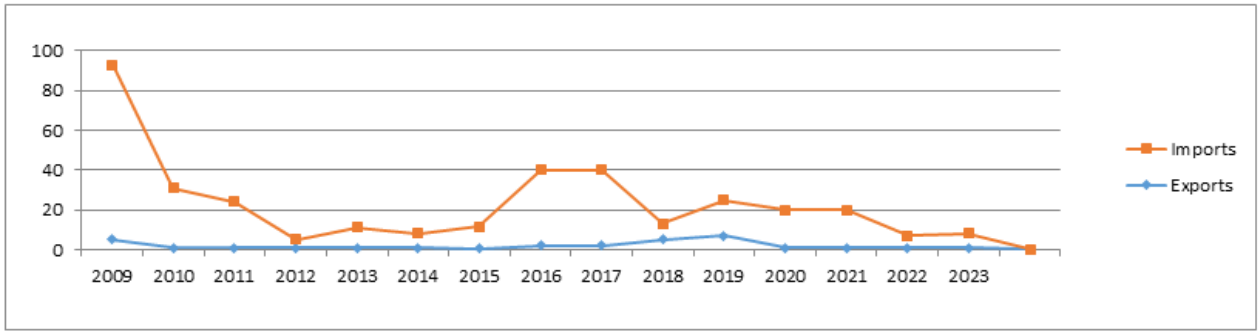
Sorghum is a significant crop in Zimbabwe due to its drought tolerance and nutritional value. It is grown in dry areas of the country, according to Chidoko (2022). While maize production dominates, sorghum remains an important food source (SADC, 2023). It is increasingly recognised for its resilience in the face of climate change and other adverse environmental conditions. Despite its importance as part of the main staple food, sorghum production in Zimbabwe faces challenges like poor agronomic practices, lack of certified seeds, and high production costs. However, the Government of Zimbabwe has managed to enhance its production by urging farmers, especially the communal ones, to grow it on a large scale in dry areas of the country through offering extension services. Sorghum production also showed good trends. Production rose from 70,000 tonnes in 2009 to 137,000 tonnes in 2014. Production rose to a record 143,055 tonnes in 2020, but fell to 82,063 tonnes in 2023. These fluctuating statistics are due to the drought experienced during the various cropping seasons. Imports have been rising during the period as a result of high demand for the crop for its various uses as food, as well as for its industrial use. There were no significant exports over the same period. Figures 3 and 4 show trends in sorghum production and trade volumes, respectively.

Figure 3: Zimbabwe sorghum production (000) metric tonnes



Source: Constructed using FAO Statistics Division data (2025)

Figure 4: Zimbabwe sorghum exports and imports (000) metric tonnes



Source: Constructed using FAO Statistics Division data (2025)

Generally, production of wheat and sorghum has been on the increase due to government support. Despite this increase in production, the imports have been on the rise too due to the high demand for the crops for consumption and also for industrial use, especially in the case of sorghum. The potential effects of the policies, despite enhancing production, have been depressed. The period under study was marred by economic underperformance due to policy inconsistencies in the agricultural sector, and hence the subsequent low exports and high imports. Given that these crops are an important component of the staple food basket in the country, they will continue to receive attention from the Government of Zimbabwe so as to achieve food sufficiency in the country.

The trends in production are attributed to adverse climatic conditions that have been bedevilling the agricultural sector in the country of late. Climate change has affected farming activities, hence the depressed production (GoZ, 2024). This has also affected export performance, resulting in high imports to complement local produce and meet the deficit of food requirements in the country. Furthermore, government funding has been inadequate due to other competing government obligations. According to the Ministry of Agriculture (2025), more funding has been channelled to importing food because of droughts experienced over the years.

Recommendations

Zimbabwe has well-formulated policies on agriculture. The National Agriculture Policy Framework (NAPF) of 2018-2030 is one of the best policies that Zimbabwe has come up with in its bid to boost agricultural production. It is carving its position as one of the significant agricultural players in the region, a status that was significantly reduced during the implementation of the land reform, especially from the year 2000. Despite the well-grounded agricultural policies, the whole implementation exercise needs to be improved. The implementation is derailed by inadequate funds that are channelled towards the sector. Also, some policies are abandoned midway. New policies come in as new officers are appointed in the sector. The study recommends that, in order to enhance wheat and sorghum production in the country, close monitoring of policy implementation is necessary. According to Chidoko (2024), infrastructure financing is important for enhancing agricultural production. The Government should formulate specific policies for specific cereals, wheat, and sorghum, included. There is also a need to come up with a Centre for Grain Research and Trade, which has a mandate of

advising the Government on matters of grain production. This is necessary as cereals are important for food security in the country.

Conclusion

Wheat and sorghum are in the small grain category, a sector that has been given much attention in recent years by the Government of Zimbabwe. With the greater attention given to these cereals, a lot of progress has been made despite policy implementation challenges and inadequate funding. The government's attention itself is commendable, as this will force other stakeholders in the agricultural sector to focus on the small grain sector, which includes wheat and sorghum. This is the right track as Zimbabwe addresses the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that recognise the need to end poverty through economic growth. Agriculture plays a crucial role in achieving several of the SDGs.

Directions for further studies

The research has been limited to wheat and sorghum in Zimbabwe. Further studies could incorporate more crops. This would give a wider spectrum in the analysis. This dimension is important as it will address policies needed in the sector that enhance overall production and trade. This is important as comprehensive policies that embrace the whole sector would be developed for the good of all other staple cereals, especially maize.

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