

Zambia and Malawi face food crisis in 2009.

A regional food security study from Michigan State University has claimed that “there is some evidence of a potential food crisis emerging in Zambia and possibly Malawi in early 2009, not because of world food price levels, but because of physical shortages, which are likely to send maize prices sharply higher over the coming months.” The report claims that maize imports will be required by both countries to avoid the rationing of government stocks, and calls for coordination between the “public and private sector over the quantities of maize to be imported and the price at which imported maize will be sold.”

The report authors emphasised the high price of maize in Malawi which has risen to “levels seen only in the most severe drought” and are US \$100 to \$150 per tonne higher than in other regional markets. The Malawi Vulnerability Assessment Committee said in October 2008 that “Speculation that the country may not have adequate supplies to last till the 2009 harvest may push prices much higher.” The authors of the Michigan University report also state that inaccurate harvest estimates have exacerbated the problem, as predicted bumper harvests have not materialised this has pushed prices up further. The Malawian principal secretary in the ministry of agriculture and food security commented “We [Malawi] have enough food.”

Zambian permanent secretary for agriculture Isaac Phiri told IRIN that “As a pre-emptive measure we are importing 100,000 metric tonnes of maize [from Latin America, as Zambia only buys non-GMO maize].” He has blamed the hoarding of maize by private traders for high prices estimating that at least 100,000 mt of maize is currently being hoarded by private traders. Food prices in Zambia continue to rise steeply and are significantly above the five-year average, according to USAID-funded the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET).