

# SD sets all time high maize harvest record in 26 years

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MACHINERY: One of the boom sprayers that were supplied at all the RDAs.

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As of 2014, for the past 23 years, the country's annual maize harvest average edged at only 1.21 tons per hectare, according to statistics sourced from the ministry of agriculture.

But, for this farming season, the country's annual maize harvest average sits at four tons per hectare, with some farmers going as high as 10 tons per hectare.

These are some of the results of the government's food security project funded by the EXIM Bank of India, according to the project implementers, Angelique International Limited.

The project commenced in 2014 and is expected to come to an end in August.

"Government has done a great job with this project and the results are very exciting," said Angelique International Assistant General Manager-Projects VV Wadappi.

In total, the country expects 120 000 metric tons of maize harvest this season.

Wadappi attributed these results to the subsidised farming inputs programme which was amongst the main components of the food security project.

Under the programme, government availed inputs to farmers, which included seeds, fertilisers and lime at a subsidised fee.

According to Angelique International agronomist Dr. Dharam Pal Kethan, by adding only lime, farmers could increase their yields by a minimum of 200 to a maximum of 300 per cent.

During a visit to the Ngwemphisi RDA last Friday, an extension officer who was found at the premises, Ndabazewe Dlamini said before the start of the input subsidy programme, a lot of farmers struggled to both buy adequate inputs and apply them appropriately.

“After the roll out of this project, I have seen some farmers even score 10 tons per hectare and this is really commendable,” he said.

Noteworthy, trucks were already flocking in to deposit maize at the National Maize Corporation (NMC) grain silo which is situated within the Ngwemphisi RDA.

Kethan said some farmers had even extended their maize cribs after recording a bumper harvest.

Also under the project, a total of 100 tractors were supplied to the country and distributed to six Rural Development Areas (RDAs).

Wadappi said the tractors were allocated on basis of the maize productivity for the identified areas.

The Ngwemphisi RDA was allocated a total of 14 tractors.

During Friday’s visit, a team of mechanics were found working on the tractors in preparation for the upcoming farming season.

“The tractors have to be attended to now, so that by the time the farming season starts they will be ready for use,” said Wadappi.

Wadappi said other tractors and implements, including boom sprayers and seed planters, were also allocated to the Motshane, northern, central and southern, and Tikhuba RDAs.

All the 17 RDAs have boom sprayers which could be used to apply both herbicides and pesticides. The boom sprayers cover a 24 metres length at once.

“We have also set up tractor workshops and installed everything that might be required for the full maintenance of the tractors,” said Wadappi.

Adding, he said they sent the whole tractor maintenance team for a 15 days training in India to capacitate them to run the workshops efficiently. Before the project started in 2014, there was only one soil testing laboratory which serviced farmers from around the country, but now, they have set up six more and have further decentralised them across the country.

Apart from the international standard soil testing laboratories, Kethan said the laboratories also have mobile soil testing kits which were also installed with everything that could be required for soil testing.

Dlamini said the decentralisation of the soil testing laboratories have significantly reduced travelling expenses for farmers.

“Farmer’s soil samples can be taken and further analysed on the spot,” he said.

Since the project is expected to come to an end in August, Wadappi said the handover process had already begun.

“It has been really an exciting time to be part of the food security project, especially if we look at the final results of the programme. We believe there is still a lot that can be done to further improve the results. At the moment, the implementation of the project is being evaluated and we are preparing to handover the project to government,” he said.