

EL NIÑO PREPAREDNESS

LESS RAIN, MORE HEAT. HERE IS THE PLAN.

A risk-by-risk response for Botswana's 2026 summer season; and the varieties, spacing and timing that carry a crop through it

SEED CO BOTSWANA

SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF METEOROLOGICAL SERVICES

SUMMER SEASON • 2026

The Department of Meteorological Services, in its mid-April 2026 winter forecast, highlighted a high risk of an El Niño effect this summer.

The Department issues these reports twice a year; the winter report in April, and the summer report at the end of September. The winter report we are benchmarking on, together with regional weather reports, indicates an El Niño effect likely to persist through the end of 2026.

Seed Co Botswana stands ready to be more than a seed supplier. We are your climate-smart solutions partner: drought tolerant and early maturing maize hybrids, resilient small grain varieties, tailored recommendations for Botswana's different production zones, and expert agronomic support.



Four Production Risks

Suppressed rainfall • extreme heat

Pest & disease pressure

Drought stress costs up to 20% of maize yield while worsening heat tolerant pests. **Fall Armyworm** thrives in El Niño heat, causing widespread defoliation; **Maize Streak Virus** spreads as leafhopper activity rises.

Heat stress, lower yields

Moisture stress during **flowering and grain filling** lowers yield and drives flower abortion, poorer grain quality, and in some instances total crop failure.

Poor germination

Moisture is very scarce during El Niño, and lack of moisture at establishment is critical. Poor germination cuts production before the season has properly begun.

Delayed rainfall

In a semi-arid, rain-fed system, delayed rain shortens the growing season, poor germination, stunted growth, greater pest vulnerability, plunging yields.

Risk, Meet Response

Five mitigation strategies

THE RISK

Reduced rainfall, dry spells, heatwaves

Districts such as Kgalagadi (Hukuntsi), Southern (Kanye), South East (Ramotswa) and Kgatleng (Mochudi) are highly vulnerable to El Niño-induced drought.

THE RESPONSE • CROP & VARIETY CHOICE

Select early maturing, drought tolerant varieties

Careful crop and variety selection is critical to improving resilience and reducing the risk of crop failure. Our sorghum **SC XH 102** performs in harsh conditions with minimal bird damage (7–10%).

THE RISK

Erratic rainfall and false starts

Rainfall uncertainty is high in Central (Serowe), North East (Francistown) and Ghanzi (Gantsi).

THE RESPONSE • PLANTING STRATEGY

Delay, then stagger

Plant only after 30–35mm within two consecutive days. Then plant in phases over days or weeks rather than the whole field at once spreading risk across the season reduces the chance of total crop failure.

THE RISK

Scarce and competed for soil moisture

Limited water resources in key rivers serving Ngamiland (Maun), Chobe (Kasane) and Central (Tuli Block).

THE RESPONSE • SOIL WATER MANAGEMENT

Conserve first, irrigate efficiently

Minimum or zero tillage to retain moisture. Efficient irrigation systems for horticulture. Control weeds early, before they compete with the crop for moisture and nutrients.

THE RISK

Crops competing with each other for water

Too many plants per hectare in a dry season means every plant reaches wilting point sooner.

THE RESPONSE · PLANT POPULATION & SPACING

Give every plant its share

For rainfed maize, a standing population of **20,000–22,000 plants per hectare**, spaced **1.0m between rows** and **0.4m between plants**.

THE RISK

Fall Armyworm and Maize Streak Virus

Pest and disease pressure climbs with temperature, and stressed plants are least able to withstand it.

THE RESPONSE · INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

Scout, rotate, then spray

Regular field scouting, resistant or tolerant varieties, crop rotation and field sanitation, timely planting and judicious pesticide use only when economic damage thresholds are reached.

The Varieties for This Season

Early maturing · drought tolerant

White Maize

SC 419

SC 555

Early maturing white hybrids with great drought tolerance capabilities, the first choice where the season is expected to be short.

Yellow Maize

SC 608

SC 506

Early maturing yellow hybrids carrying the same drought tolerance, for farmers producing into the yellow maize market.

Sorghum

SC XH 102

The variety of choice for harsh conditions; a tremendous performer that delivers good yield with minimal bird damage of just **7–10%**.

Get the Numbers Right

Rainfed maize · plant population and spacing

20–22k

PLANTS PER HECTARE

1.0 m

BETWEEN ROWS

0.4 m

BETWEEN PLANTS

30–35 mm

RAIN OVER TWO DAYS
BEFORE PLANTING

District Watchlist

Where each strategy matters most

HIGHEST DROUGHT VULNERABILITY

Kgalagadi (Hukuntsi), Southern (Kanye), South East (Ramotswa), Kgatleng (Mochudi)

Lead with variety choice; early maturity is the primary defence.

STAGGER AND TIME THE PLANTING

Central (Serowe), North East (Francistown), Ghanzi (Gantsi)

Align planting dates with the onset of effective rains and spread establishment across the window.

WATER MANAGEMENT CRITICAL

Ngamiland (Maun), Chobe (Kasane), Central (Tuli Block)

Conserve and optimise the limited resources in key rivers to sustain irrigation long term.

In Conclusion, Farmers Are Encouraged To

Six actions

- ☐ Purchase certified Seed Co seed early, guided by agro-ecological region.
- ☐ Prepare land before the rains.
- ☐ Plant immediately after effective rains; 30–35mm over two consecutive days.
- ☐ Follow recommended agronomic practices for spacing, population and weed control.
- ☐ Consult local Seed Co agronomists for technical support.
- ☐ Adopt climate smart farming practices to improve resilience and productivity.

SEED CO BOTSWANA - Your Climate Smart Solutions Partner

Reliable forecasts, the right seed, sound agronomy and timely advice build resilient farming systems and safeguard productivity despite the challenges El Niño may present.