

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EL NIÑO

And how to prepare for the 2026/27 farming season



El Niño does not cancel the season it changes the odds. The farmers who plan early, choose the right hybrid for their region and conserve every millimetre of moisture are the ones who still harvest.

SEED CO AGRONOMY TEAM · ZAMBIA SEASONAL ADVISORY · 2026/27 SEASON
AGRO-ECOLOGICAL REGIONS I, II & III

Understanding El Niño

Why this season needs a plan

El Niño is a naturally occurring climate phenomenon associated with unusual warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean. It can significantly influence weather patterns across Southern Africa.

With seasonal climate outlooks indicating an increased likelihood of El Niño conditions during the 2026/27 growing season, farmers need to begin preparations early. Although forecasts will continue to be updated, the possibility of challenging rainfall conditions makes early planning and the adoption of resilient farming practices essential.

The right seed, the right agronomy and the right timing are what turn a difficult season into a **survivable** one.

Everything in this advisory can be actioned before the first rains fall. Start with variety choice; it is the single decision that carries the most drought risk with it, then work through the eight field actions that follow.

Selecting the right seed is one of the most effective ways of reducing drought risk. Seed Co has developed climate-resilient maize hybrids that have demonstrated good drought tolerance and wide adaptation across Zambia's major agro-ecological regions.

DROUGHT-TOLERANT HYBRIDS FOR 2026/27

SC719

SC657

SC647

SC555

SC561

SC419

Match the variety to your region

Table 1 • Variety recommendation

Farmers should select varieties suited to their specific production environment. Use this as your shortlist when you visit your nearest Seed Co agent or dealer.

Region I LOWRAINFALL • HOT, DRY VALLEYS SC303 • SC419 • SC555 • SC647 • SC657 Lean towards the earliest maturity options so the crop finishes before moisture runs out.	Region II MEDIUMRAINFALL • MAIN MAIZE BELT SC419 • SC555 • SC561 • SC657 • SC719 Combine maturity groups across your fields rather than committing everything to one hybrid.	Region III HIGHRAINFALL • LONGER SEASON SC561 • SC647 • SC657 • SC719 • SC727 Longer-season potential remains, but keep an early-maturing block as insurance.
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FIELD ACTION 01 • SPREAD THE RISK

Do not rely on a single maize variety.

Farmers in Agro Ecological Regions II and III in particular should plant a combination of **early, medium and late-maturing** Seed Co varieties. Staggered maturity spreads production risk and reduces the likelihood of total crop failure when rainfall distribution becomes erratic.

BEFORE YOU BUY

- **Buy certified seed only.** Recycled seed loses vigour and yield exactly when the season gives you no margin.
- **Know your region.** A hybrid that performs in Region III may run out of season in Region I.
- **Plan the whole field.** Decide your early / medium / late split before you reach the depot.

01

Plant early with first effective moisture

Timely planting is critical during an El Niño season. Plant soon after receiving the first effective rainfall of approximately **30–40 mm**. Early planting gives crops an opportunity to establish before prolonged dry spells and allows them to make better use of available soil moisture.

03

Minimise soil disturbance

Conservation farming practices such as **ripping and planting basins** help improve rainfall infiltration, reduce runoff and preserve soil structure. These practices enhance the ability of soils to retain moisture and support crops through dry periods.

05

Maintain good field hygiene

Weeds compete with crops for water, nutrients and sunlight. Keeping fields weed-free throughout the season is particularly important under moisture stress, because it ensures available soil moisture is used by the crop rather than by unwanted vegetation.

07

Seek agronomic advice

Climate uncertainty should not be faced alone. Seek guidance from **Seed Co Agronomists**, use the Seedney App, follow Seed Co's social media platforms and consult Government agricultural extension officers.

02

Retain crop residues

Crop residues should be retained in the field rather than burned. Crop stover helps conserve soil moisture, improve water infiltration, reduce evaporation, protect the soil from erosion and gradually improve soil organic matter, an important component of conservation agriculture.

04

Maintain the recommended plant population

Excessively high plant populations increase competition among plants for limited water and nutrients. Follow recommended plant populations so that individual plants have adequate access to the soil moisture and nutrients that are available.

06

Monitor weather forecasts

Regular access to seasonal and in-season weather information supports timely decisions on planting, fertilizer application, irrigation and other critical field operations. Make weather monitoring part of routine farm management download the **Seedney App** for daily forecasts.

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Reliable, timely technical information

can make the difference between crop failure and a successful harvest. If you are unsure about a variety, a spacing or a fertilizer decision this season, ask before you plant not after.

THE THREE THAT COST NOTHING

Keep the stover.

Free mulch, free moisture, better infiltration.

Kill the weeds early.

Every weed you leave is drinking your crop's water.

Watch the forecast.

Daily outlooks on the Seedney App shape every field decision.

Conclusion

A difficult season, not an impossible one

Climate change continues to make agricultural production increasingly unpredictable. However, proactive planning, informed decision-making and the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices can significantly reduce production risks.

While El Niño presents serious challenges, it also provides an opportunity for farmers to strengthen their resilience through improved genetics, conservation agriculture, water management and sound agronomic practices.

With the right seed, the right agronomic practices and timely management, farmers can improve their chances of achieving successful harvests even under **difficult climatic conditions**.

Ready to support farmers

Talk to a Seed Co agronomist

Preparing for an El Niño season starts with the right seed choice. Visit your nearest Seed Co agent or dealer to access certified varieties suited to your production environment. Representatives can help you match a hybrid to rainfall expectations, maturity period and local growing conditions.

Climate uncertainty should not be faced alone; reliable, timely technical information is what separates a failed field from a harvested one.

OUR AGRONOMISTS WILL ADVISE YOU ON

Variety selection

Plant population

Fertility management

Conservation farming

Harvest management

SEED CO - Growing Prosperity Together

Visit your nearest Seed Co agent or dealer for certified, drought-tolerant varieties matched to your agro-ecological region ahead of the 2026/27 season. Download the Seedney App for daily weather forecasts and agronomic guidance.

