



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Research Findings on Maize Strengthen Case to End Export Bans in Tanzania



USDA/ERS

A smallholder farmer grows corn in Tanzania.

Between March and June 2012, research analysts from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service teamed up with USAID, the International Food Policy Research Institute, and Associates for International Resources and Development to carry out an analysis of Tanzania's policies to address food insecurity, with a particular focus on the impacts of Tanzania's 2011 ban on maize exports.

After the team presented its results to the Government of Tanzania, officials pledged to end the use of export bans and to seek alternative measures to address food insecurity. A principal finding of the analysis was that the system the Government of Tanzania uses to identify districts suffering potential food shortages tends to overestimate the importance of maize in the people's diets. Exaggerated estimates of maize shortages led in turn to political pressures to impose export bans or restrictions.

Based on the data set they analyzed, researchers found a much greater degree of dietary diversity in Tanzania than had been assumed by the government. For example, one finding that is significant at the national level shows important differences in diet between rural and urban populations and across income quintiles. Maize makes up 43 percent of calories for rural consumers, but only 32 percent for urban consumers. The lowest income quintile relies on maize for 48 percent of calories consumed, but for top earners maize comprises only 27 percent of calories.

Since maize is a relatively cheap source of calories, the share of maize in total food expenditures across all income groups is low—25 percent or less. Thus, a spike in maize prices may not be as alarming as Tanzanian officials had previously believed, if prices of other foods remain stable.

Under Feed the Future, USDA's Economic Research Service has proposed using these findings to help the Government of Tanzania target its policies to improve food security based on a more accurate, nuanced assessment of diets in Tanzania. The government's pledge to end export bans on maize (which it has not broken despite currently high domestic prices) is an important step in fostering an enabling environment for economic growth and expanded trade in the agriculture sector.