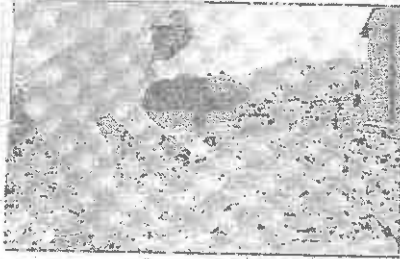


Maize growers 'may lower meat prices'



Meat prices could be affected by local maize farmers buying cattle in order to minimise the effect of low maize prices.

Siweko (jobani)

Leadership by the...

The tendency among maize farmers to buy cattle to recall their losses in order to minimise the effect of the low maize price might lead to a drop in meat prices, farmers body Grain SA has predicted.

Grain SA economist Nico Hawkins was responding to concerns raised by the Meat Producers' Organisation, which said many maize farmers were buying and reselling cattle as many of them faced significant losses because of low maize prices.

Hawkins said some of Grain SA's members doubted as stock farmers "and obviously they will try to create the best situations for themselves to make profit."

"But I must admit that buying in cattle for resale will inevitably affect prices, because of the supply and demand phenomenon."

The Meat Producers' Organisation chairman Lardus van Zyl told the SABC that most maize farmers bought cattle at harvest time and put them in their own feedlots for a few months.

This tended to upsurge the market when it is a peak was sold at the same time "and that often causes the food retail prices to plummet". It took months for the "artificial" prices to return, he said.

Hawkins said it was common for maize farmers to be involved in other farming activities.

Maize futures on the JSE Securities Exchange SA ended last week at R576 a ton following the release of the second estimates of the agriculture department's crop estimates committee which said commercial maize farmers were likely to grow a crop of 11.1-million hectares in the current season.

The figure is 8.5% higher than earlier estimates.

This season's crop will be the highest since commercial farmers reaped 12.1-million tons of corn in the 1993-94 season, said Rene Beukes, spokeswoman for the crop estimates committee.

Three weeks ago Grain SA announced that farmers cut planting 10% this year in order to reduce the surplus and to keep prices from falling further. *With Bloomberg*

GM rice could reduce blindness

LONDON - Scientists in Britain have developed a strain of genetically modified rice which they say could reduce vitamin A deficiency and childhood blindness in developing countries, the BBC said yesterday.

The biotechnology firm Syngenta's laboratories in Britain have developed a strain of "golden rice" that produces around 20 times as much beta-carotene, which the body converts to Vitamin A, as previous varieties. It re-

ported.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that up to 500,000 children go blind each year because of vitamin A deficiency.

Syngenta said it is making the new rice strain available free to research centres across Asia, which will begin field trials if they receive approval from their governments, according to the BBC.

An original strain of "golden rice" was developed in Switzer-

land five years ago, but it did not produce enough beta-carotene to ensure that children received their daily requirement from eating normal quantities of rice, the BBC said. Nor has it been grown in field trials in Asia, because of concerns about genetically modified agriculture.

Some agricultural experts and environmental groups say a better way to fight vitamin A deficiency is to ensure people get a balanced diet. *Sapa-LEP*