

Statement tabled in Senate & University  
Native Affairs on 9/2/42

FOOD POSITION IN NATIVE AREAS AND STEPS  
TAKEN TO DEAL WITH A POSSIBLE SHORTAGE



S.A.P.A. Report

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The abnormal drought which has been experienced in so many parts of South Africa has given cause for anxiety as regards its effect upon the food position in Native areas where the population are for the most part almost entirely dependent upon maize and its products for their subsistence.

About the beginning of the year it became apparent, from complaints emanating from various centres, that traders were experiencing difficulty in obtaining maize and mealie meal for supply to their Native customers. In the opinion of the Mealie Industry Control Board these difficulties were attributable to three main factors:

- (a) the shortage of white mealies;
- (b) The subdivision of orders for maize into consignments of smaller quantities with a view to obtaining the higher prices laid down under the price control scheme set forth in Government Notice No.1670 of 1941, as amended from time to time;
- (c) the shortage of rolling stock on the railways.

These difficulties were met as follows:

- (a) By the promulgation under Proclamation No.23 of 1942 (War Measure No.10 of 1942) of regulations for the compulsory blending of white and yellow mealie meal;
- (b) by the issue, on the instructions of the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, of a circular to all traders, millers, co-operatives and brokers threatening drastic action if the objectionable practice continued;
- (c) by arranging with the Railway Administration for preference being given as regards the transportation of maize consignments certified as being for human consumption.

The situation has undoubtedly improved: Partly as a result of the action set forth above and partly owing to the release by certain companies of quantities of mealie meal for sale to traders for Native consumption.

It may be mentioned here that facilities also exist whereby Natives may obtain mealies direct from the Mealie Industry Control Board. The details of the scheme are set forth in the Native Affairs Department's Circular No.47 of 1941. Briefly, the position is that Natives may, with the assistance of the Native Commissioners, obtain maize free on rail at elevator stations in minimum lots of ten bags at 12/9d per bag.

It has been ascertained from the Mealie Industry Control Board that recently the demand for mealies and mealie meal has eased off considerably. This is probably due to the availability of green mealies in the coastal belts.

Beans



At the middle of last month there were 2½ million bags of mealies available. In the opinion of the Mealie Industry Control Board the supply will be sufficient to meet the country's requirements until the new season's crops become available about the middle of May.

Drastic powers of control over the disposal of mealies and mealie products have been conferred upon the Mealie Industry Control Board by Proclamation No.47 of 1942 (War Measure No.20 of 1942). As from 1st April, the Board is taking over all existing mealie contracts and surplus maize.

Careful inquiries were instituted throughout the Native areas with a view to ascertaining what the position was in various parts of the country and determining what measures would be necessary to guard against the possibility of actual food shortage. The breaking of the drought in certain areas has improved conditions considerably and the Department's representatives in these localities are now more optimistic than they were about a month or six weeks ago.

The following are summaries from the latest reports from the various Chief Native Commissioners:

Transkeian Territories: Copious rains have resulted in material improvement to the crop position which, especially in Eastern Pondoland and the coastal districts, is satisfactory. The crops in the inland districts, however, which suffered acutely from the drought, will be below normal. Additional sowings on a large scale took place as soon as the rains fell and food supplies of green mealies should be available in all districts other than those which are subject to early frosts.

CISKEI: Owing to the general rains the crops in most areas have made a remarkable recovery and the possibility of a serious food shortage is not now imminent. Generally speaking the Natives have the money to purchase their requirements and if the application of the powers recently conferred upon the Mealie Industry Control Board will ensure the execution of traders' orders for Native consumption the position may be regarded as satisfactory. It is confidently expected that in certain districts the crops, both of mealies and kaffir corn, will be considerably better this year than for a number of years past.

NATAL AND ZULULAND: The Chief Native Commissioner has recently toured a considerable portion of Northern Natal and Zululand. The position in regard to crops varies considerably. In certain localities the excessive heat burnt up practically the whole crops and very little yield can be expected in such cases. In districts where rains ultimately fell later crops were planted and the yield is likely to vary according to locality and climatic conditions, from about 25% to 75% of normal. It may be assumed that, with reasonable weather conditions, the average crop should be about 50%.

Only a few Natives still have mealies of their own growing and they are having to purchase their requirements. In



most cases there appears to be no shortage of ready cash for this purpose. In certain districts the Natives are availing themselves of the facilities provided for obtaining their supplies direct from the Mealie Industry Control Board.

NORTHERN AREAS: The severe drought still continues and crops planted early in the season have failed. In addition the army worm has appeared in many districts and has adversely affected the later crops. There will thus be an abnormal shortage of food production in these areas and less than 25% of normal crops is anticipated. Up to the present there has been no actual starvation in the Native areas. Speaking generally the Natives are not short of money to purchase food and there is no lack of employment.

While the threatened shortage has been averted for the time being it seems clear that the ill effects of the drought will be felt later on in the year. With a view to minimising such ill effects the Department has taken all possible steps to insure increased crop production during the next twelve months. Seed of quick growing varieties of maize, beans and peas, wheat and potatoes have been supplied to Native Commissioners for issue to Natives on repayment and the latter have been urged to plant as much land as possible. Fertiliser is being supplied to them on a subsidy basis at 50% of cost.

The South African Native Trust is also undertaking crop production - particularly in localities where there is land under irrigation.

Wherever practicable, arrangements were made for the ploughing of Natives' lands by Departmental tractors at a reduced charge of 2/- per morgen.

The success of all these efforts towards increased crop production will, of course, depend very largely upon weather conditions.

The possibility of providing ploughing units for preparing Natives' land for next season is at present under consideration.



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