

119

Number of confirmed  
Batswana cases

54

Active cases  
(Batswana)

63


Number of recoveries  
(Batswana)

2

Deceased

Above figures are as of 27 July.

# Effects of COVID-19 on the Agricultural Sector



The COVID-19 pandemic is a global crisis which is already affecting the food and agriculture sector. Prompt measures to ensure that food supply chains are kept alive, domestically and internationally, to mitigate the risk of large shocks that would have a considerable impact on everybody, especially on the poor and the most vulnerable. Due to COVID-19, value chain disruptions are expected to trigger sudden price changes and increase in price volatility.

The pandemic will also likely raise production costs amid a fall in food commodity prices, increasing the vulnerability of farm incomes. The agriculture sector in most countries is also exposed to labour shortages, and in labour intensive low-income countries, where subsistence farming systems prevail, labour shortages would also have repercussions for food security.



## Food security

Both lives and livelihoods are at risk from this pandemic. Although the spread of the pandemic has been well managed in Botswana, COVID-19 continues to spread in other countries. This is still a global problem calling for a global response. What we know is that the virus will eventually retreat, but we don't know how fast this will happen. We also know that this shock is somewhat unusual as it affects significant elements of both food supply and demand.

The country risks a looming food crisis unless measures are taken fast to protect the most vulnerable, keep global food supply chains alive and mitigate the pandemic's impacts across the food system. Border closures, quarantines, and market, supply chain and trade disruptions are restricting people's access to sufficient/diverse and nutritious sources of food.

The Chief Agricultural Economist in the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food Security Ezra

Ramogapi has noted that it was unfortunate that countries were on panic mode and resorted to saving goods for local consumption and not exporting more goods in the fear of a food crisis. He added that COVID-19 should not affect international trade but countries should set precautions to enable the easy movement of goods between countries.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is adamant that there is no need for the world to panic. Globally, there is enough food for everyone. Policy makers around the world need to be careful not to repeat the mistakes made during the 2007-08 food crisis and turn this health crisis into an entirely avoidable food crisis.

FAO is particularly concerned about people's access to food in the medium and long term. The significant slowdown of all economies of the world and specially of the most vulnerable ones - as unemployment rates have risen, and COVID-19's economic impacts will be felt more - will make countries, especially food

import-dependent countries like Botswana, struggle to have the needed resources to buy food.

## Effects on the Farmers

Countries are experiencing challenges of logistical bottlenecks where COVID-19 regulations are slowing the movement of commodities. Shortage of fertilizers, veterinary medicines and other input could affect agricultural production. Closures of restaurants and less frequent grocery shopping will diminish demand for fresh produce, affecting producers and suppliers. Agricultural sectors are particularly affected by restrictions on tourism, closure of restaurants and schools.

The COVID-19 crisis hit Botswana during the ploughing season and a lot of farm operations were deferred as it was hard to source manpower due to tight extreme social distancing rules. Usually farmers engage casual labourers to either assist with weeding,

harvesting or any other farm activity but COVID-19 regulations minimized movement between farms and towns. Movement restrictions have also frustrated efforts by both government and farmers to control pests and animal diseases. Under normal circumstances farmers consult Extension Workers on a regular basis for guidance on any suspicious development in their farm but this privilege could not be fully utilized as everyone was advised to stay home. Agricultural workshops were also halted, and this deprived the farmers the privilege to exchange ideas and farming experiences.

The FAO Assistant Representative Lesedi Modo has explained that due to COVID-19 regulations, small scale farmers were hard hit as markets were not easily accessible. Crops such as sweet reeds have a short shelf life and

are usually sold on the streets, therefore movement restrictions directly affected its sale hence it was piled up in farms with nowhere to take it. She noted that as the lockdown eased farmers had to sell their produce at low prices to avoid crop damage.

Modo added that Botswana is currently experiencing a fuel shortage crisis and farmers will surely feel the pinch if the situation deepens. "Farmers use fuel for their boreholes, farm machinery and transport to the farms. It is high time farmers try to diversify their sources and use solar power. If the issue is not quickly resolved it will surely affect the agricultural sector", Modo said.

In a joint ministerial press briefing held on the 2nd April 2020, The Minister of Agriculture Development and Food Security Dr Edwin Dikoloti

lamented that the beef industry is one of the sectors that will be hard hit by the novel COVID-19 impact as the demand for the Botswana beef in the global market has decreased. However, government has decided not to discontinue slaughtering, but farmers will need permits to take livestock to slaughter points for local consumption.

FAO Botswana is currently supporting the Government through its Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) to assess the impact of COVID-19 on Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition. As it's not clear when COVID-19 will subside, a response strategy has been developed and FAO is part of the team that will try to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture, food security and nutrition.

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## How Countries can mitigate the COVID-19 effects on Food Security

Pro-active measures are paramount and will cost less at a time when economic resources will be heavily needed. This is doubly the case given growing expectations of a global recession. Economic slowdowns or contractions were associated with rising hunger levels in 65 out of 77 countries in recent years, as FAO and partners warned in the 2019 The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report.

To avoid disruptions to the food supply chain and food production, FAO is urging all countries to:

- ✓ Keep international trade open and take measures that protect their food supply chain (from obtaining inputs such as seeds to assuring smallholder farmers have access to markets to sell their produce).
- ✓ Focus on the needs of the most



vulnerable, and scale up social protection programmes including cash transfers.

- ✓ Keep their domestic food supply value chains alive and functioning.
- ✓ Taking all necessary precautions, seeds and planting materials must continue to flow to smallholders; animal feed to livestock breeders; and aquaculture inputs to fish farmers. Keep agricultural supply chains alive by any means whilst the safety and wellbeing of everyone working along the food chain is protected.
- ✓ Maintain agricultural activities.
- ✓ Countries should meet the immediate food needs of their vulnerable populations. Ensure emergency food needs are met; adjust and expand social

protection programmes; scale up nutritional support; support management and prevention of undernourishment.

- ✓ Countries should boost their social protection programmes. This could entail increasing transfer amounts to people already benefiting from social assistance through a one-off payment (prior to full blown impact of the crisis as an early action to mitigate impact) or ensure multiple payments to help families meet their basic needs.
- ✓ Countries should gain efficiencies and try to reduce trade-related costs, they should not impose measures that would restrict trade and mobility of commodities; reduce food waste and losses, resolve logistics bottlenecks.



## COVID-19 and Child Labour

As the battle against the spread of COVID-19 intensified and countries went on lockdown, schools closed and more children made their way to cattle posts and farms hence possibly being exposed to child labor. Due to school closure and economic hardships in households, children sometimes find themselves subjected to harmful, unacceptable and often risky working conditions.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) 2017 estimations indicate 70% of child labor victims across the world are in the Agricultural sectors including fisheries, forestry, livestock and crop farming. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to push more children out of school increasing their exposure to child labour.

On the 12th of June, FAO joined the rest of the world in condemning Child Labor as well as launching a new Framework on Ending Child Labour in Agriculture. This year's observance focused on exploring child labour mitigation measures through livelihood and food assistance, social protection, health and education programmes which can help protect children from bearing the brunt of the pandemic impacts.

FAO strives for a world where children are not exposed to hazardous work and have access to quality education and vocational training in rural areas, and sufficient and nutritious food, giving them the resources to grow and to become healthy, productive and skilled producers or workers of tomorrow.

“We have both a responsibility and opportunities to act. Poverty is the main reason why we still have so much child labour. Crisis conflicts disasters and the impact of climate change have made many vulnerable small-scale farmers more dependent on child labour. We need to act now and implement food security and agriculture responses to prevent the children from paying the price of the crisis”

FAO Director General Qu Dongyu stated.

## Common FAQs on Food and COVID-19

### 1. Can I get COVID-19 from food?

**Answer:** Currently, there is no evidence that the new coronavirus that causes COVID-19 can be transmitted by food. The virus is transmitted primarily by people who are infected through coughing and sneezing droplets which are then picked up by another person.

### 2. Can the SAR-CoV-2, the virus causing COVID-19, grow and survive on food?

**Answer:** Coronavirus cannot grow on food. While bacteria under the right conditions can grow on food, a virus such as the one that causes COVID-19, requires a living host in order to multiply. Though the virus can survive on objects and surfaces, it is not known how long it can survive on food

and what amount of contamination would make a person sick.

### 3. How can I make sure my food is safe to eat?

**Answer:** The best way to avoid COVID-19 is through good hygiene habits. Always wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and dry thoroughly with a clean towel - after shopping, before handling food and during preparation, before eating and after using the bathroom. All equipment and surfaces used for food preparation should be washed and sanitized.

### 4. How can consumers keep safe when buying food?

**Answer:** It is important to follow the measures put in place locally at the market or supermarket and maintain physical distance from other people when selecting food items and in line. Keep hands clean and do not shop if you have any symptoms.

### 5. As a consumer, how can I keep safe when shopping for food? Should I be concerned about food packaging?

**Answer:** Handling food packaging is an unlikely cause of COVID-19. Under experimental conditions, the virus can survive on a variety of surfaces such as plastic or cardboard used in packaging, but it is unlikely that this type of exposure would be sufficient to make a person sick. Always wash your hands after unpacking food. Additional precautions include wiping down and disinfecting surfaces. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth when handling food and food packages and wash reusable shopping bags regularly.



Photo obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture



## 7 HEALTHY EATING TIPS TO FACE THE COVID-19 CRISIS

### 1. Strengthen your immune system through a proper diet

Increase your consumption of fruits and vegetables, with at least five servings a day. They contain a lot of vitamins A and C, in addition to antioxidants, which will help you fight infections. Eat legumes at least three times a week: they keep for a long time, are inexpensive and will help you stay healthy, because they are high in proteins and iron.

### 2. Don't just buy non-perishable food

Instead of buying a lot of pasta and rice, buy fruits, vegetables and legumes. Did you buy extra fruits and vegetables? No problem: clean, cut and freeze them. You will have them ready for your next preparation.

### 3. Plan your purchases: buy what is necessary and fair to everyone

This is not only an act of empathy with other people who must also stock up, but it helps you avoid food waste and improve the economy of your home.

### 4. Don't throw away your leftovers

If you cooked too much, freeze your meals so they last longer to avoid waste, in addition to having a preparation ready for another occasion, without much effort. Remember: food must be in good condition to consume it!

### 5. Drink plenty of water

Drink at least two liters of water a day to stay hydrated and support your immune system.

### 6. Make the most of your budget

If your budget is limited, we recommend preferring water to sugary drinks. Take a good look at what you have in the pantry and the freezer. Buy products according to their duration.

### 7. Cook with your kids

The confinement in which many of us find ourselves is also an opportunity to cook at home and incorporate children in this activity, so that they learn healthy eating habits from an early age.