United States Department of Agriculture

**Foreign Agricultural Service**
Global Market Analysis
International Production Assessment Division
Web: https://ipad.fas.usda.gov

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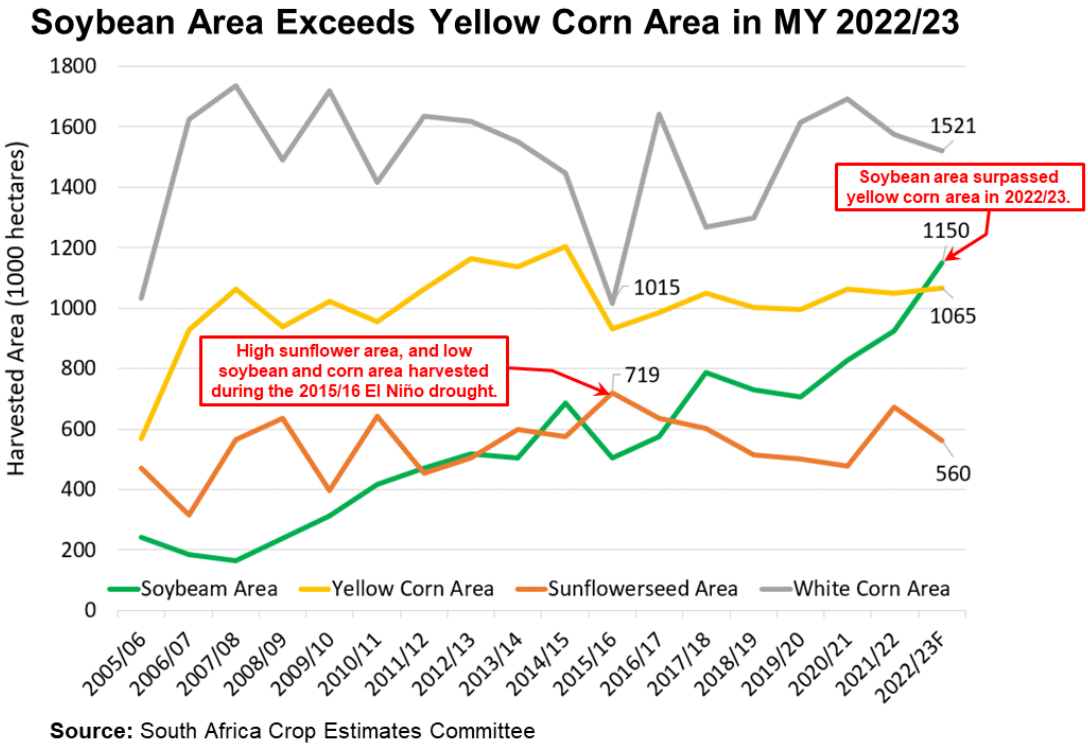
Commodity Intelligence Report

# South Africa Soybean Area Rapidly Increases

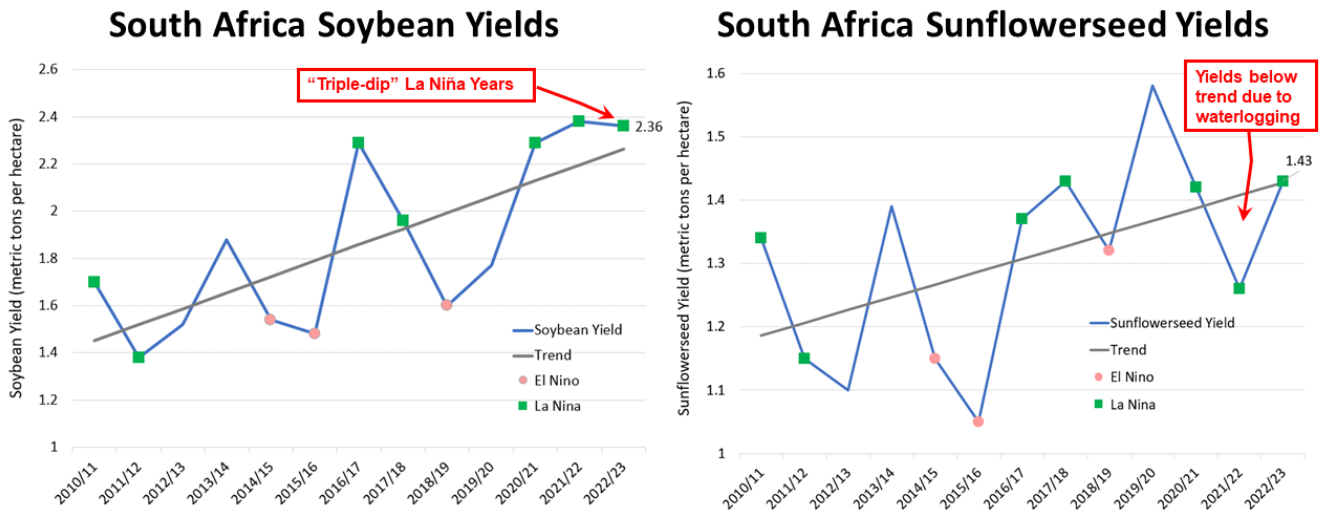
South Africa's soybean production for marketing year (MY) 2022/23 is estimated at a record 2.7 million metric tons (mmt), up 0.1 mmt (2 percent) from last month and up 0.5 mmt (23 percent) from last year. Area is estimated at a record 1.2 million hectares (mha), unchanged from last month, but up 0.5 mha (23 percent) from last year. High fertilizer prices during the time of planting motivated farmers to plant record soybean area, and total soybean area for MY 2022/23 was greater than yellow corn area for the first time (Figure 1). In addition, South Africa's soybean oil and meal crushing capacities have increased in recent years which helps to satisfy local soy oil demand for human consumption and soy protein meal for animal feed.




**Source:** South Africa Crop Estimates Committee

**Figure 1. Soybean, Sunflowerseed, and Yellow Corn Area in South Africa**

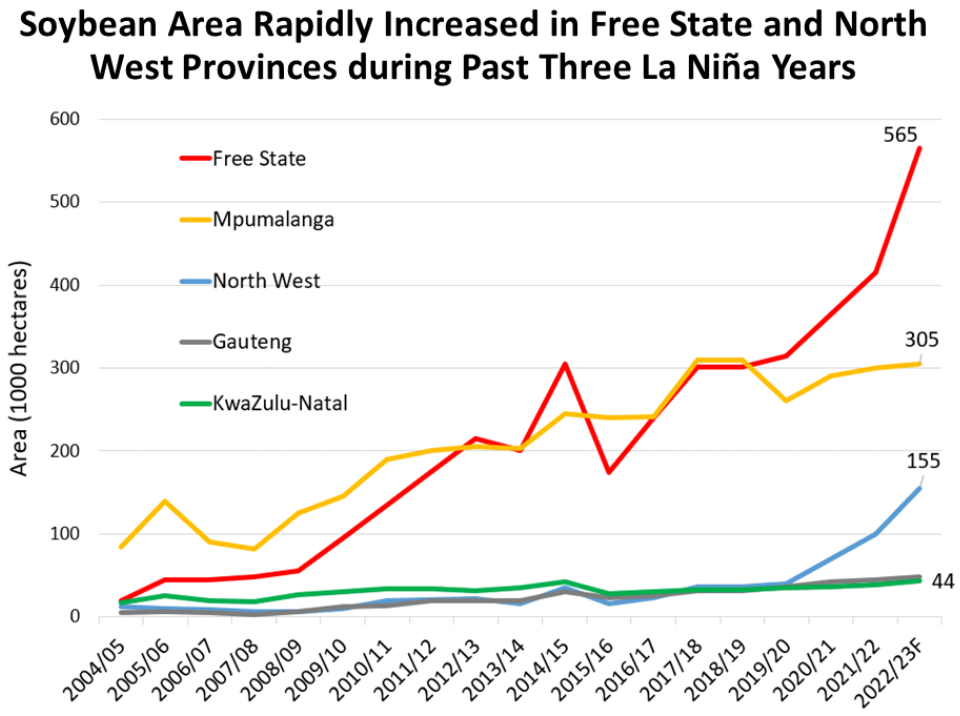
Soybean yield for MY 2022/23 is estimated at 2.36 metric tons per hectare (t/ha), up 2 percent from last month and 18 percent from the five-year average, and slightly below last year's record yield of 2.38 t/ha. Soybeans performed better than sunflower last year because sunflower experienced waterlogging problems in regions with high groundwater table (Figure 2).




**Sources:** USDA PSD Online (for crop yields) and NOAA's Oceanic Niño Index (ONI) for classification of La Niña and El Niño years.

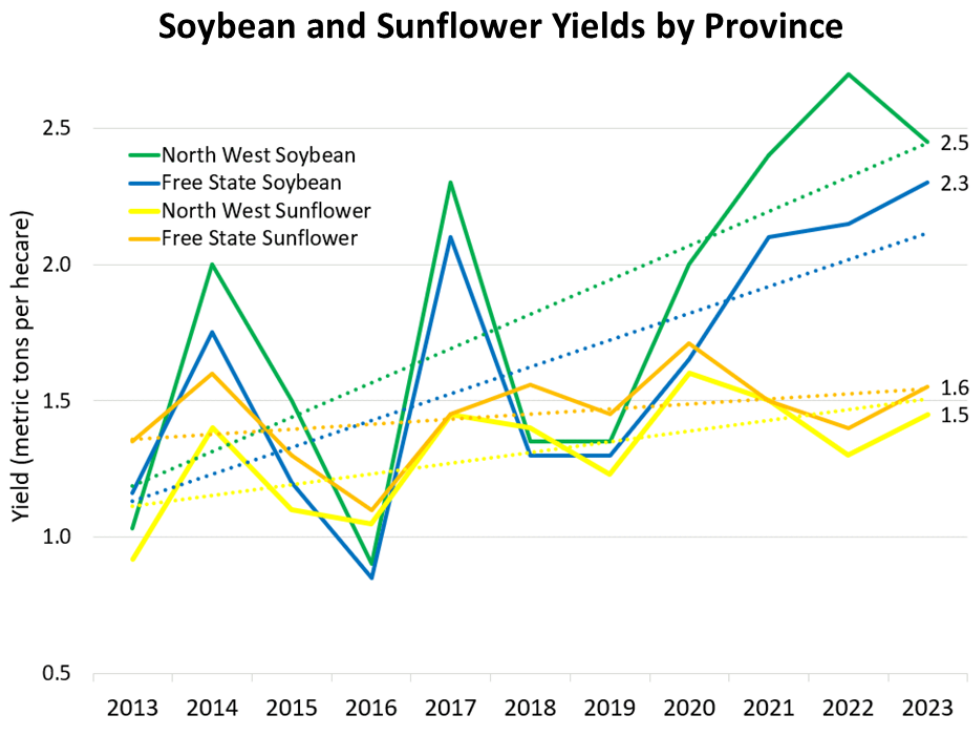
**Figure 2. Soybean and Sunflowerseed Yields for South Africa**

South Africa soybean area rapidly increased during the past three La Niña years, especially in Free State and North West provinces where soybean is the most predominate oilseed crop grown in rotation with corn (Figure 3). Recent soybean yield increases have out-paced sunflower yields in the western Free State and North West provinces because seed companies have provided higher yielding soybean cultivars that perform well in the dry agro-climate of the western corn belt (Figures 4 and 5).



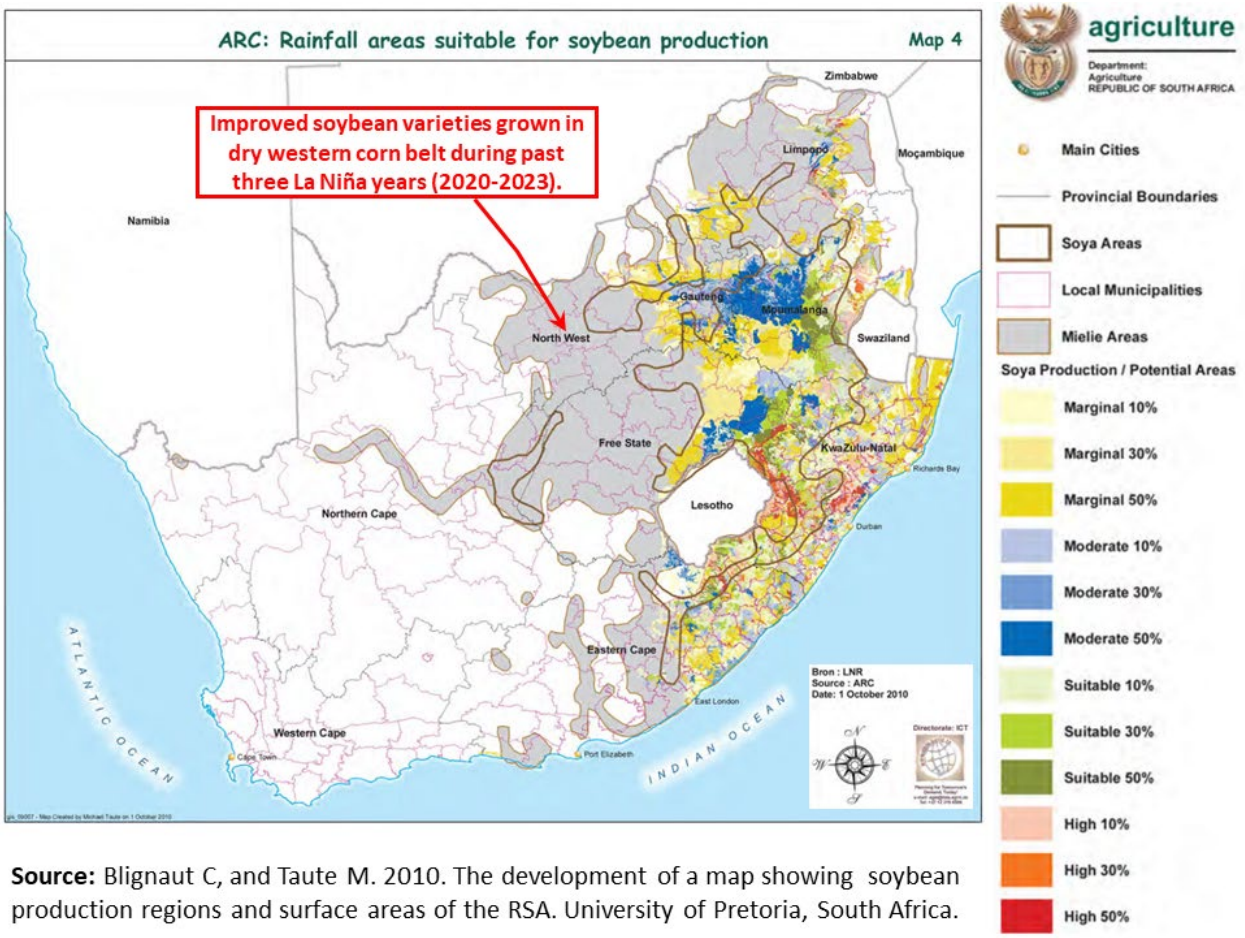

**Source:** South Africa Crop Estimates Committee

**Figure 3. Soybean Area Rapidly Increased in Dry Western Provinces during Past Three Years**




**Source:** South Africa Crop Estimates Committee

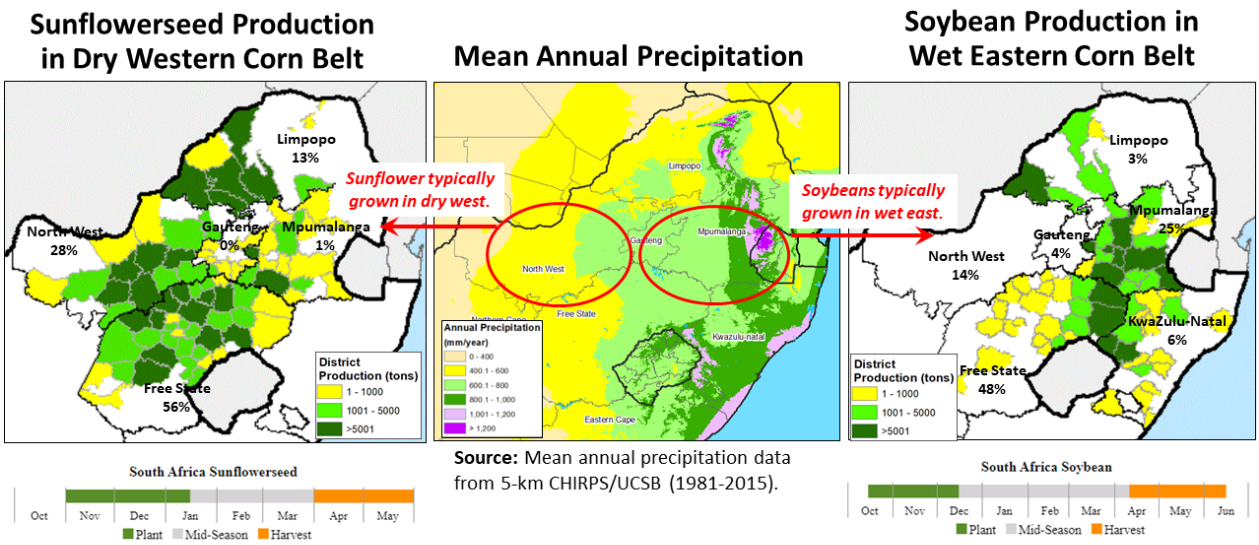
**Figure 4. Soybean Yield Increases in North West and Free State Provinces Out-Pace Sunflower**




**Source:** Blignaut C, and Taute M. 2010. The development of a map showing soybean production regions and surface areas of the RSA. University of Pretoria, South Africa.

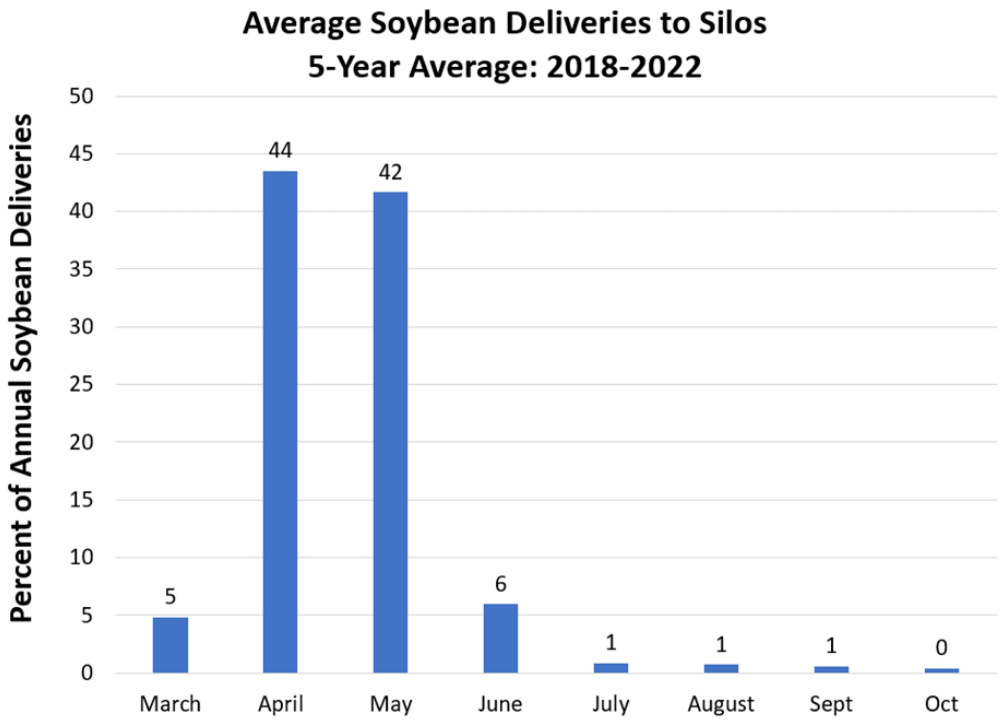
**Figure 5. Improved soybean varieties planted in dry western corn belt during wet La Niña years.**

Soybean production is grown primarily in the eastern part of the corn belt, or eastern Free State (48 percent of total MY22/23 production), Mpumalanga (25 percent), North West (14 percent), and KwaZulu-Natal (6 percent) provinces (Figure 6). Dryland soybean reaches maturity by April, and the bulk of the soybean harvest (approximately 86 percent) is delivered to the grain silos during April and May (Figure 7).




**Crop Production Sources:**
1). Percentage production values from April 2023 forecast by South Africa's Crop Estimates Committee, Depart. of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.
2). District production from 2007 Census of Commercial Agriculture, Statistics South Africa, 2011.

**Figure 6. Soybean and Sunflowerseed Production in South Africa's Corn Belt**




**Source:** South African Grain Information Service (SAGIS); Weekly Producer Soybean Deliveries to Silos

**Figure 7. Average Soybean Deliveries to Silos**

As a point of reference, approximately 11 percent of total soybean production was irrigated in 2017 (Table 1), and irrigated soybeans tend to be harvested slightly before dryland soybeans (in March) due to earlier planting dates. Many farms located along the western Free State and North West border have a shallow groundwater table that assists to water deep-rooted crops, such as sunflower, during the summer season (Figure 6, sunflower production map).

**South Africa Soybeans Area and Production for 2007 and 2017**

| Province | Planted hectares | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | | Dry land | | Irrigated | |
| | 2007 | 2017 | 2007 | 2017 | 2007 | 2017 |
| Western Cape | | 404 | | 404 | | |
| Eastern Cape | 1 409 | 4 368 | 1 409 | 4 368 | | |
| Northern Cape | 412 | 379 | 329 | | 83 | 379 |
| Free State | 22 178 | 202 549 | 21 854 | 196 277 | 324 | 6 272 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 14 894 | 21 457 | 12 255 | 12 700 | 2 639 | 8 756 |
| North West | 5 102 | 17 258 | 1 883 | 13 139 | 3 219 | 4 119 |
| Gauteng | 1 014 | 10 348 | 1 007 | 9 596 | 7 | 751 |
| Mpumalanga | 56 734 | 207 149 | 52 461 | 202 673 | 4 272 | 4 476 |
| Limpopo | 5 378 | 6 254 | 2 694 | 1 213 | 2 684 | 5 041 |
| **South Africa** | **107 124** | **470 169** | **93 895** | **440 372** | **13 228** | **29 796** |

| Province | Production in metric tons | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | | Dry land | | Irrigated | |
| | 2007 | 2017 | 2007 | 2017 | 2007 | 2017 |
| Western Cape | | 760 | | 760 | | |
| Eastern Cape | 1 653 | 8 835 | 1 653 | 8 835 | | |
| Northern Cape | 924 | 758 | 785 | | 139 | 758 |
| Free State | 29 914 | 342 180 | 29 450 | 323 693 | 464 | 18 486 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 31 644 | 52 990 | 23 947 | 24 808 | 7 697 | 28 181 |
| North West | 12 130 | 32 091 | 3 003 | 20 096 | 9 127 | 11 994 |
| Gauteng | 1 556 | 22 501 | 1 542 | 19 444 | 14 | 3 057 |
| Mpumalanga | 87 302 | 366 677 | 77 926 | 353 950 | 9 375 | 12 726 |
| Limpopo | 12 640 | 15 755 | 5 071 | 1 839 | 7 569 | 13 916 |
| **South Africa** | **177 765** | **842 549** | **143 378** | **753 428** | **34 386** | **89 121** |

**Source:** Statistics South Africa, 2020. Census of commercial agriculture, 2017. Report No. 11-02-01 (2017), Pretoria, South Africa

**Table 1. Dryland and Irrigated Soybean Production during 2007 and 2017.**

FAS personnel traveled in South Africa's corn belt in mid-March 2023 (Figure 8). They interviewed crop analysts from the five major grain cooperatives, and they visited several farms in North West and Free State provinces. Crop conditions were reported to be most favorable in the Free State province where record soybean yields of 2.3 t/ha are expected. Free State province accounts for approximately 48 percent of the total soybean crop during MY 2022/23. In addition, soybean crop conditions in Free State were considered better than last year due to less waterlogging problems in

the high-water table regions located near the western Free State and North West border.

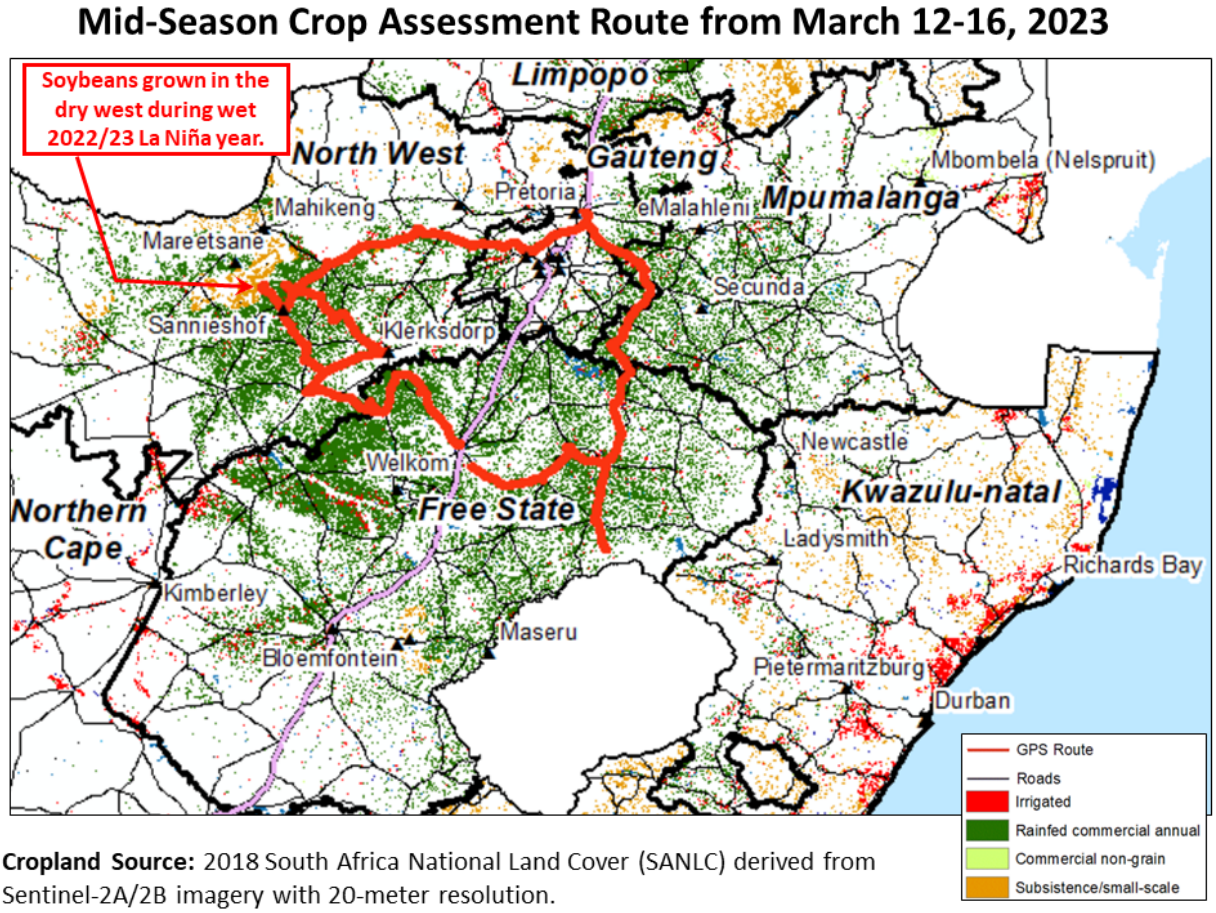



**Figure 8. Mid-Season Crop Assessment Route from March 12-16, 2023**

FAS staff also visited a farm located in the dry western part of the corn belt (located near Sanneishof) where soybeans were planted in mid-November 2022 and record or near record soybean yields are expected at harvest time in mid-April 2023 (Figures 8 and 9). Farmers in the dry western corn belt mentioned they recently switched from sunflower to soybeans due to improved soybean varieties suitable for dry agro-climates in the western corn belt (Figure 5). They also mentioned they will monitor La Niña or El Niño forecasts in September to determine if they will plant soybeans during a wet La Niña year or sunflower during a dry El Niño year (Figure 10).

**Soybeans (background) were planted next to sunflower (foreground) on the dry western edge of South Africa's corn belt.**

*(Farm located near Sanneishof, North West, South Africa with annual precipitation of 600-mm per year.)*

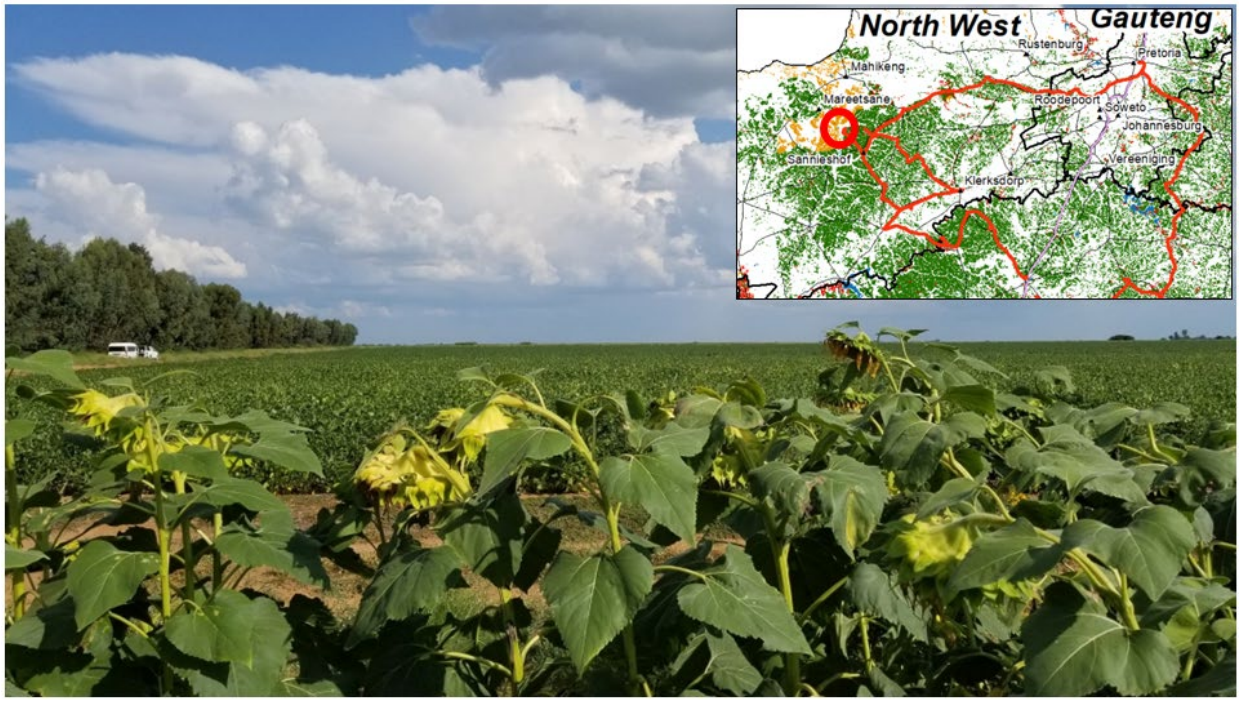
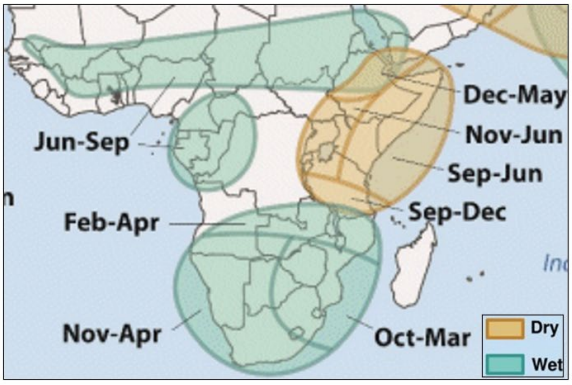


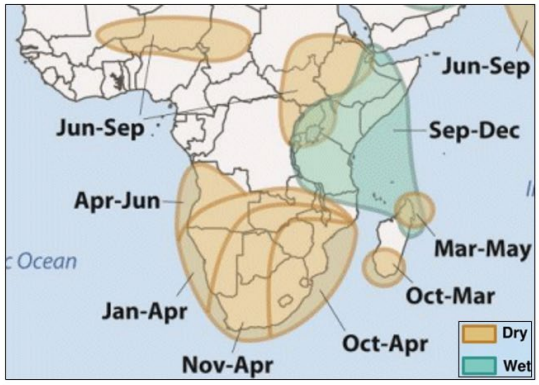

**Figure 9. Soybeans and sunflowerseed planted in South Africa's dry western corn belt.**

**Soybeans Planted in Western South Africa Corn Belt during "Triple-Dip" La Niña Years (July 2020-February 2023)**




*Typical La Niña Rainfall Anomalies*

**Sunflower to be Planted in the Western South Africa Corn Belt during Upcoming El Niño Years**




*Typical El Niño Rainfall Anomalies*

**Source:** FEWS NET, 2020: El Niño/La Niña and Precipitation, Agroclimatology Fact Sheet Series

**Figure 10. Soybeans planted during wet La Niña years and sunflowerseed planted during dry El Niño years in South Africa's western corn belt.**

## References:

Blignaut C, and Taute M. 2010. The development of a map showing the soybean production regions and surface areas of the RSA. University of Pretoria, South Africa. https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/Legacy/sitefiles/file/48/2052/blignautcandtautem2010soybeanproductionregionsofrsa_pdf.pdf, Accessed on April 14, 2023

Statistics South Africa, 2020. Census of commercial agriculture, 2017. Report No. 11-02-01 (2017), Pretoria, South Africa, https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-11-02-01/Report-11-02-012017.pdf, Accessed on April 14, 2023

### Author contact information:

Curt Reynolds
Curt.Reynolds@usda.gov

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