

**Foreign Agricultural Service**

Global Market Analysis

International Production Assessment Division

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April 18, 2025

# Commodity Intelligence Report

## Soybean Area Increases from Improved Soybean Cultivars in South Africa

Soybean area in South Africa's corn belt has been increasing for decades and surpassed yellow corn area during the past three years. The rapid increase in soybean area in recent years can be attributed towards improved early-maturity and drought resistance cultivars that have been performing well under dry agroclimatic conditions in western Free State and North West provinces and to better management practices for all provinces (Figures 1-5).

In South Africa, soybeans are classified into four maturity groups (MG) ranging from 4 to 7, and they cover four major climatic regions, as shown in Figure 2. Soybean maturity groups under cooler regions (MG 4 and 5) are grown in higher altitudes near the Lesotho highlands; temperate region maturity group soybeans (MG 5 and 6) grown within and near Gauteng province; warm region soybeans (MG 6) grown in western Free State and North West provinces; and hot region soybeans (MG 6 and 7) primarily grown in Limpopo province.

South Africa's soybean maturity groups are very similar to the USA maturity groups 4 to 7, except the USA maturity groups are more finely classified by adding one decimal place, whereby MG 5.3 (USA) indicates a cultivar is closer to MG 5 (South Africa) while MG 5.7 (USA) indicates the cultivar is closer to MG 6 (South Africa).

Soybeans in rotation with corn or wheat help to increase potential yields for both crops as annual crop rotations can break pest and disease cycles, which helps to reduce the reliance on chemical pesticides and fosters a more resilient farming system. In addition, soybean nitrogen fixation in soils help to reduce chemical fertilizer use for subsequent crops planted after soybeans.

Improved cultivars and better farming practices have increased trend yields for all provinces, according to South Africa's Crop Estimates Committee (CEC) data. In addition, average five-year yields are now greater than 2.0 tons per hectare (t/ha) for rainfed soybeans predominately grown in Mpumalanga, Free State and North West provinces, while average five-year yields are greater than 3.4 t/ha for irrigated soybeans predominately grown in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo provinces (Figures 5).

Other technological advances for improved soybean cultivars have been the introduction of genetically modified (GM) seeds since the early 2000s. Glyphosate

tolerant GM seeds help to control weeds without the use of chemical herbicides and provide the potential for no-till farming. It is estimated that this year's South Africa soybean crop constituted roughly 95 percent of GM soybean plantings. Finally, South Africa's domestic market for soybean products has improved as crushing capacities increased from approximately 860,000 metric tons in 2012 to around 2.2 million tons in 2025 (Matsimela, M. 2025).

**References:**

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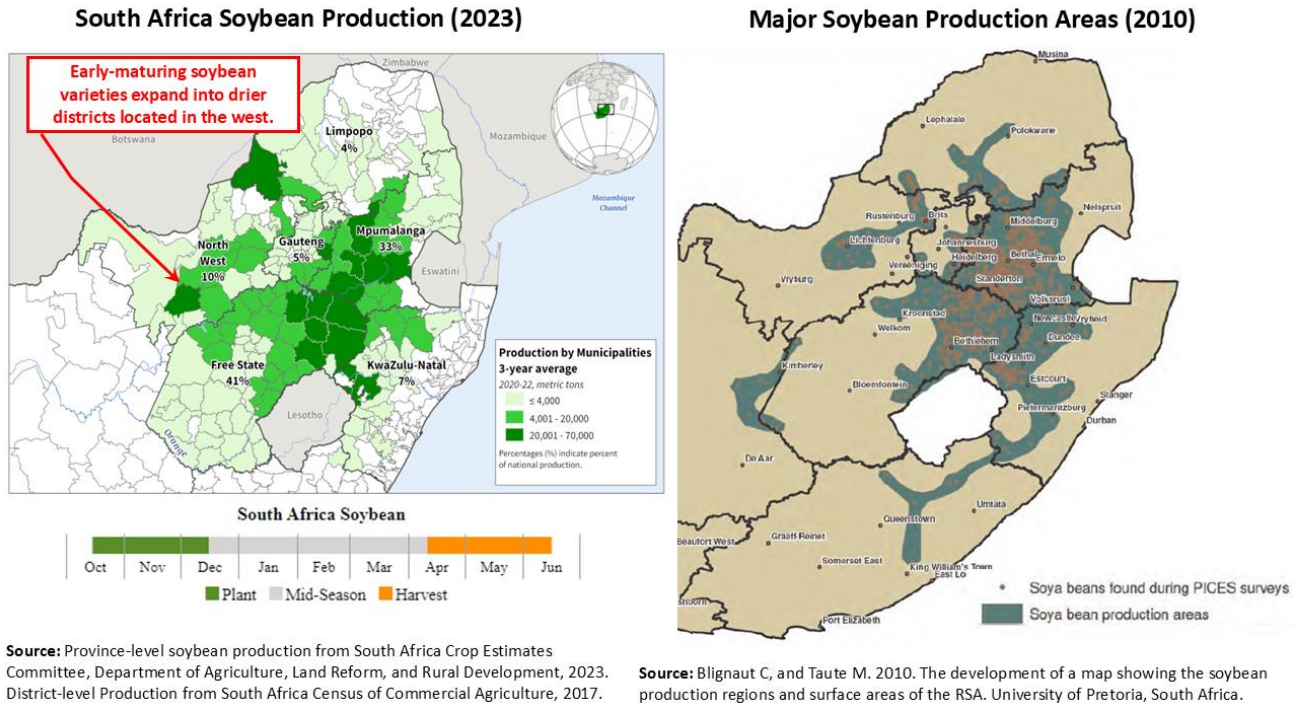
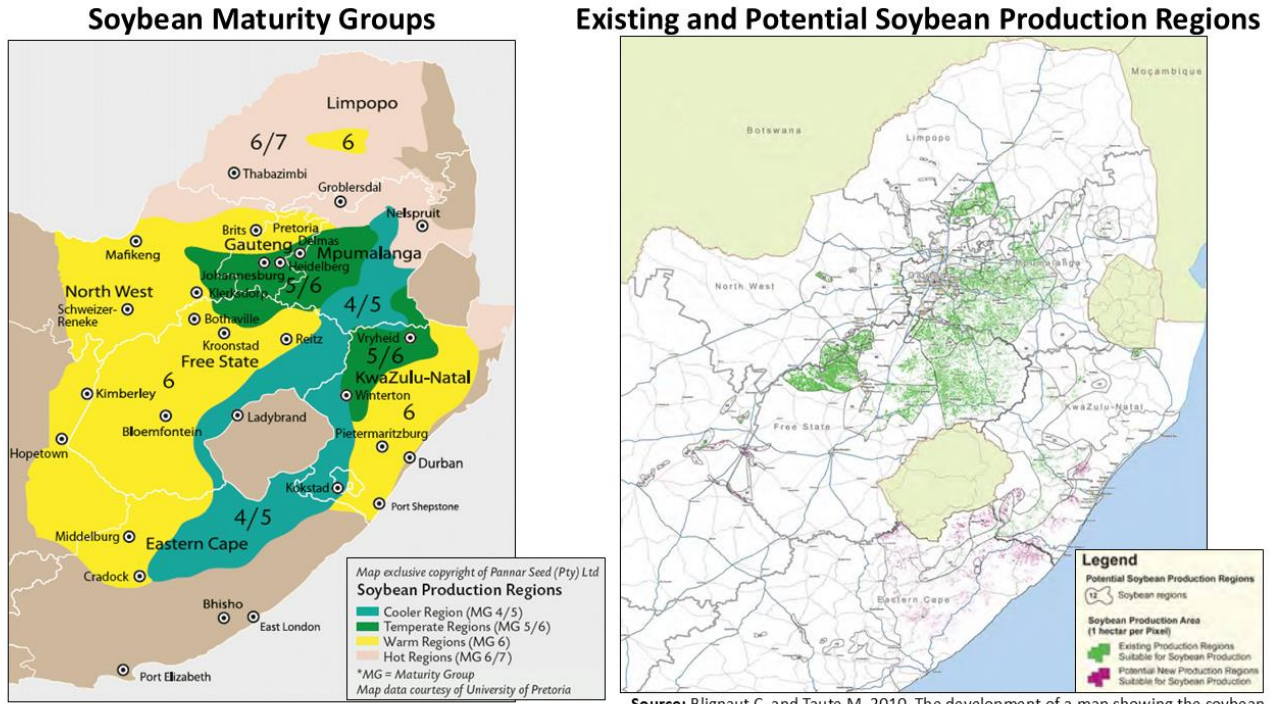


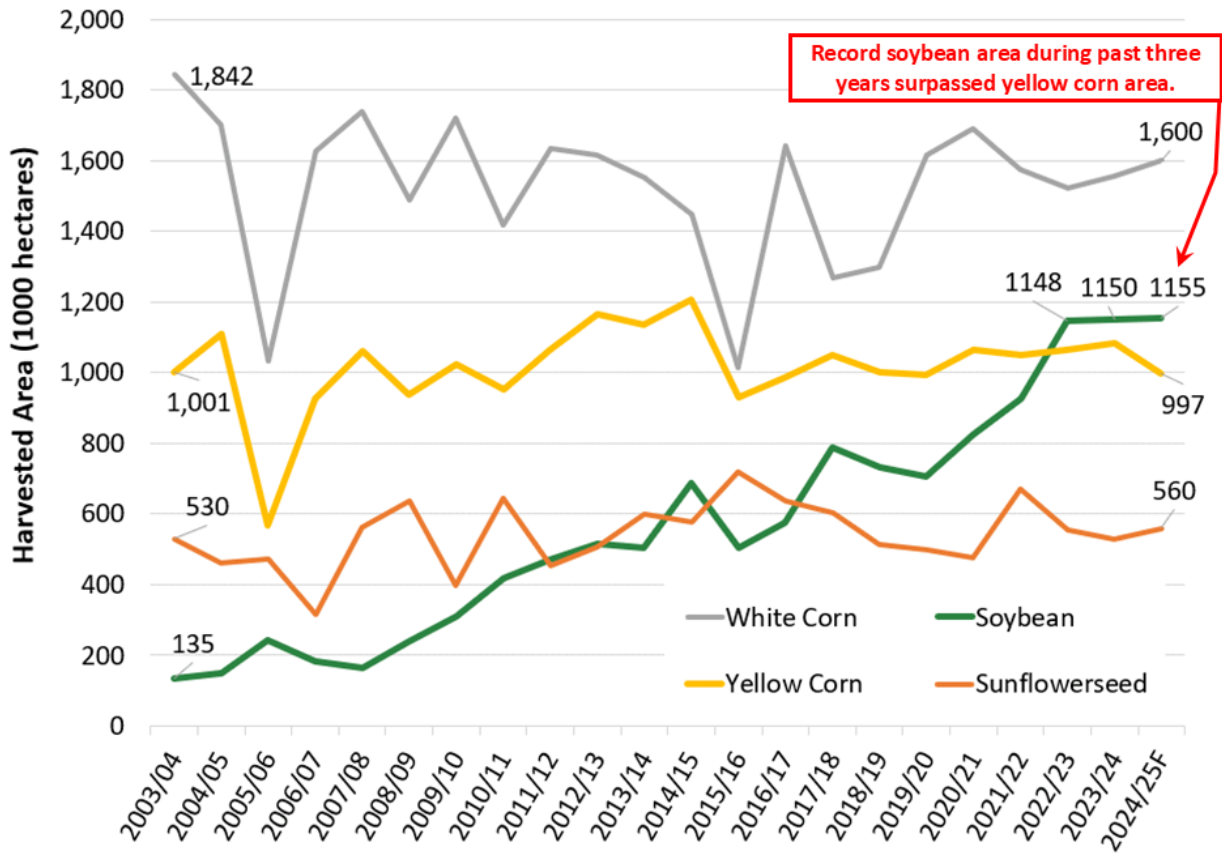
Figure 1. South Africa soybean production expands to drier districts located in the west.



Source: Pannar 2025 Product Catalogue. South Africa.

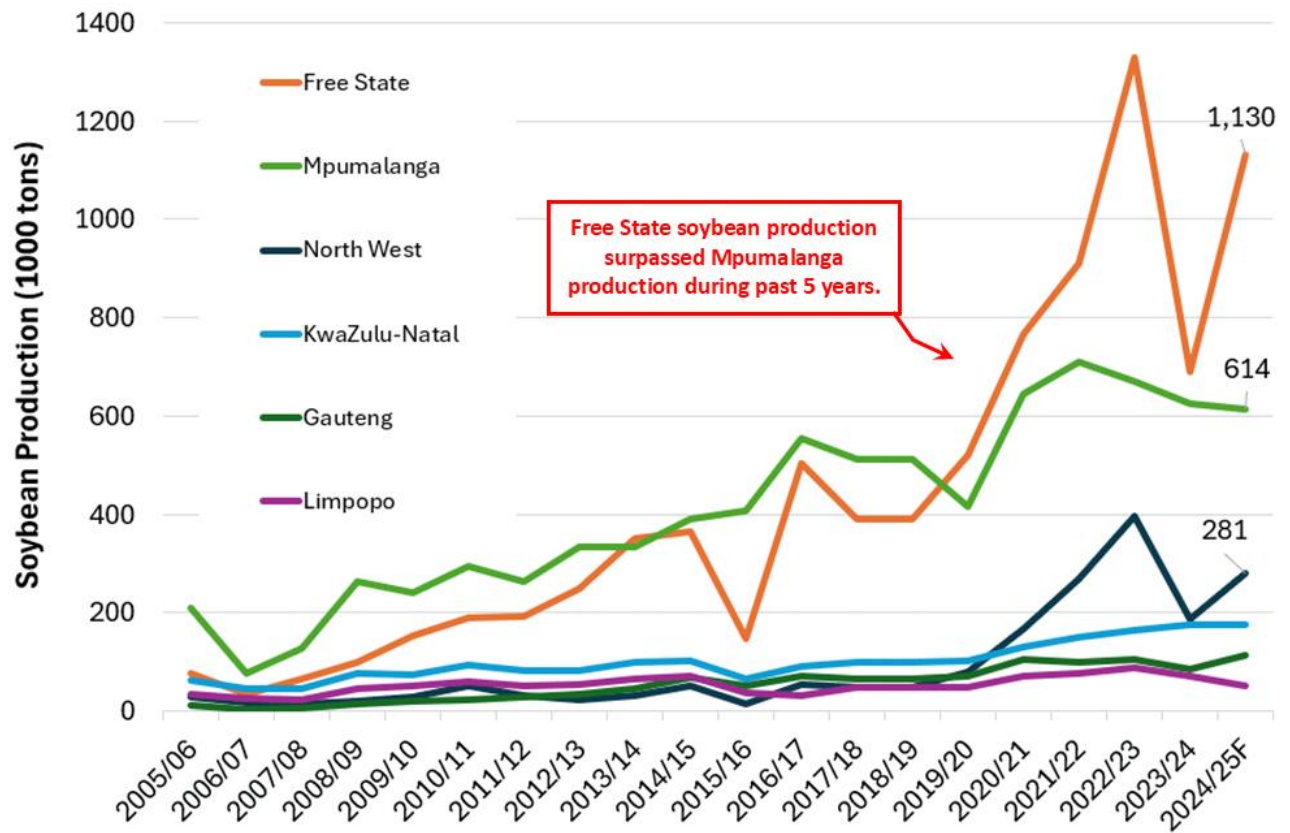
Source: Bignaut C, and Taute M. 2010. The development of a map showing the soybean production regions and surface areas of the RSA. University of Pretoria, South Africa.

Figure 2. Soybean maturity group regions (left) and potential soybean expansion regions (right).



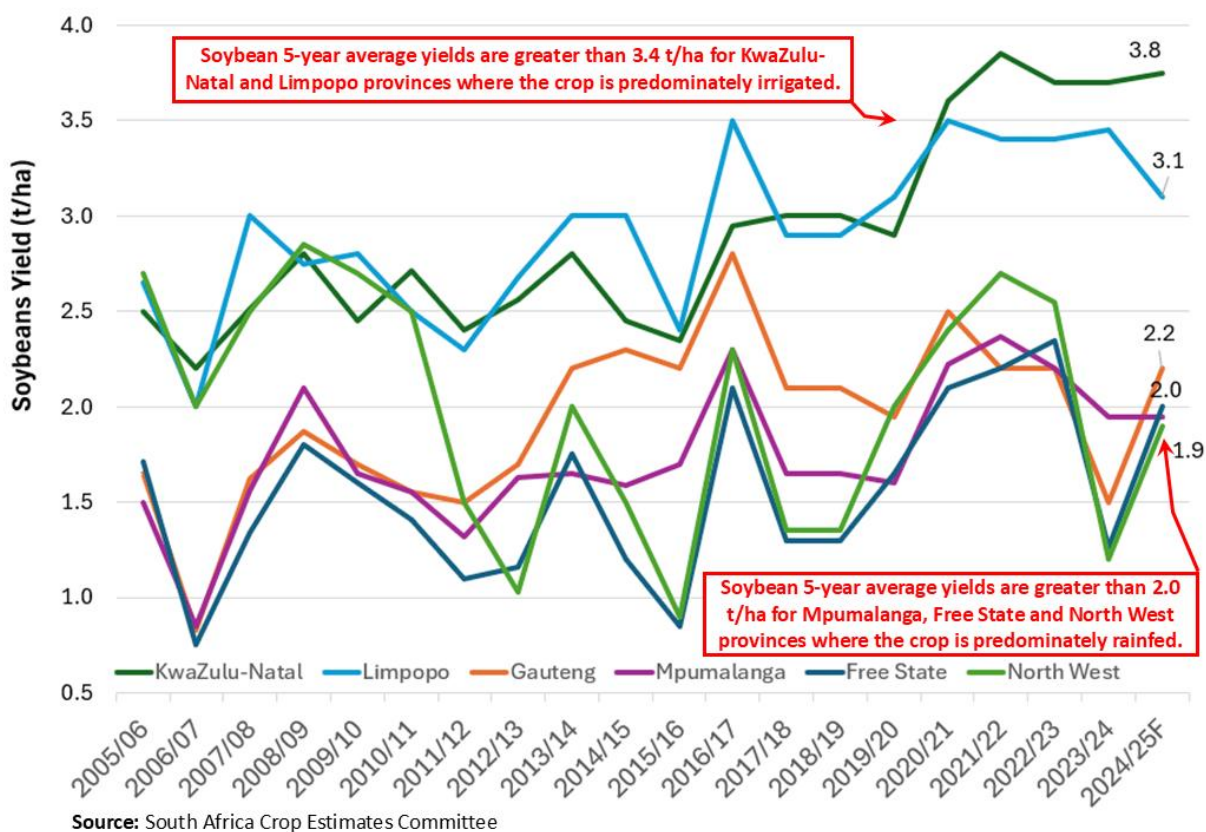
Sources: Soybean and sunflower area from PSD Online, April 2025.  
 White and yellow corn area from South Africa Crop Estimates Committee

Figure 3. Soybean area exceeded yellow corn area after MY 2021/22.



Source: South Africa Crop Estimates Committee

Figure 4. Free State soybean production exceeded Mpumalanga production after MY 2019/20.



**Figure 5. Average yields for rainfed production provinces are greater than 2.0 t/ha and average yields for irrigated production provinces are greater than 3.4 t/ha.**

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