

Editor's note 2

On FISP

Three reasons why it is a bad idea to expand the Farmers Input Support Programme (FISP) as planned by government (see page 6):

1. FISP has been ineffective at raising yield (productivity per hectare) – with improvements largely linked to expanded area and favourable weather.
2. FISP has only been marginally successful at raising farmer incomes, as wealthy rather than poor farmers are more likely to participate.
3. FISP has not achieved food security – at least at community level. Despite running since 2002/03, 44 districts are in need of relief food in 2014.

Yes, we are drowning in maize – 3.4 million tonnes in the 2013/14 season, according to reports – but why is that good? We could have bought the same amount for a lot less than what it cost us to grow it. Even if we assign importance to self-sufficiency, Zambia only needs 1.9 million tonnes of maize a year. The rest we have to sell, but at a loss, due to all the subsidies provided by FISP and the Food Reserve Agency. And this week Zimbabwe, Zambia's prime export market, announced that it expects a bumper harvest of its own in 2014.

Government got into power in 2011 with a promise to reform the maize system. Now it is probably too late, because who wants to upset 1 million voters ahead of a rapidly approaching election in 2016?