

3.5 Sierra Leone Food and Additional Suppliers

Agriculture is the primary occupation in Sierra Leone, employing two-thirds of the labor force and accounting for 50% of GDP. Most Sierra Leoneans live on small, scattered farms, following a scheme of bush-fallow rotation, slash-and-burn field preparation, and limited use of fertilizer. Agricultural exports in 2004 amounted to nearly \$13.9 million and consisted of coffee, cocoa, palm kernels, piassava, kola nuts, and ginger. Rice, grown by 80% of farmers, is the most important subsistence crop and, along with millet in the northeast, is a food staple; 265,000 tons were produced in 2004, down from an annual average of 508,000 tons during 1989 to 1991. The Rice Research Institute, located in the Northern Province, breeds high-yielding varieties for seed. Other domestic food crops include cassava, yams, peanuts, corn, pineapples, coconuts, tomatoes, and pepper. Coffee is grown in the eastern and southern provinces; production totaled 18,000 tons in 2004. Cocoa is grown in the Kenema and Kailahun districts of the Eastern Province and in the Pujehun District of the Southern Province, mainly on smallholdings of about 0.4–1.2 hectares (1–3 acres). In 2004, an estimated 11,000 tons of cocoa beans were produced. Palm produce is derived from stands of wild palms, mainly in the northeast and southeast; production in 2004 included 24,375 tons of palm kernels and 39,000 tons of palm oil. Although there is substantial local consumption of palm kernels, they are a major agricultural export. Piassava, a raffia palm fiber used for broom and brush bristles, is grown in the swampy areas of the extreme south. Small amounts of kola nuts were also exported, and modest crops of bananas, pineapples, and sugarcane were grown.

The World Bank estimates that Sierra Leone will lose at least \$1.4 billion in economic growth in 2015 as a result of the Ebola outbreak, leading to an "unprecedented" GDP contraction of 23.5 percent. The economic damage has been exacerbated by a sharp decline in global iron ore prices and the collapse of the mining sector amid an exodus of foreign investors. The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak resulted in a serious shock to the agriculture and food sectors in 2014. The epidemic started spreading when crops were being planted and expanded during the crop maintenance and the critical harvesting period for the staple crops rice, maize and cassava.

In Sierra Leone, the aggregate food crop production is estimated at about 2.09 million tons, about five percent lower than 2013. Milled rice production, accounting for about 85 percent of the cereal production, is estimated at 770,000 tons, about 8 percent below last year. However, the modest decline at the national level masks the significant harvest declines at sub-national levels of up to 17 percent.

Cereal import requirements in 2015 are estimated at 300,000 tons, slightly up from last year. Rice import requirements account for about 215,000 tons of the total. With commercial imports estimated at 285,000 tons the uncovered gap is estimated at about 55,000 tons for which additional resources and international assistance is required. The significant impact of Ebola on export earnings is expected to have compromised the country's ability to import more.

Sierra Leone faces numerous challenges in its capacity to deliver goods and services. These challenges are found across all productive economic sectors and include human, financial, manufacturing, technological and infrastructural capacities. During and after the civil war, the country's human resource base dwindled as a result of the migration of highly trained professionals and skilled workers to more lucrative markets, a situation quite glaring in the public sector. A weak national infrastructure (roads, transport, electricity, water and sanitation) also contributes to the limited production of goods and services for the domestic and export markets.

For more information, please see the following link: [4.10 Sierra Leone Producers, Wholesalers, and Retailers List](#)