Groundnuts are a high-value crop produced mainly in the northwestern regions of South Africa, particularly the western and northwestern parts of the Free State, North West and Northern Cape. Groundnuts are also produced in Limpopo and Mpumalanga, but to a lesser extent.

Area planted
From 2010 to 2019, most of the plantings (40.9%) occurred in the Free State, followed by North West (40.7%), Northern Cape (12.6%) and Limpopo (5.5%). The local groundnut market has been extremely volatile, mainly because of changing weather conditions in the local production regions over the past two or three years.

The estimated area under groundnuts in the 2019 season is 20 050ha, the lowest on record. If one looks at the area under groundnuts historically, an average of 24 000 to 26 000ha of groundnuts were planted in the late 1930s and early 1940s. From 1946, plantings increased rapidly to a record high of 393 000ha in 1970, after which it decreased to the current low level.

The current area planted shows a considerable decrease of 64.4% (36 250ha) when compared to the 56 300ha planted in 2018. It is also 141 771ha below the 50-year (1969 to 2018) average of 161 821ha, 42 248ha below the 20-year (1999 to 2018) average of 62 248ha, and 30 403ha below the ten-year (2009 to 2018) average of 50 453ha.

Groundnut production
Figure 3 illustrates groundnut production from 1937 to 2019. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the average output of groundnuts was between 4 100 and 9 700 tons. During the 1974 season, groundnut production reached 384 000 tons, its highest level ever. Since 1975, however, production started declining to its current level, mainly as a result of a decrease in plantings.
The fifth crop estimate of 2019 projects a crop of 18 880 tons. This is the smallest harvest since 2016, when 17 680 tons were produced. It also represents a decline of 66.9% compared to the 57 000 tons produced in 2018. This year’s harvest is 84.6% lower than the 50-year average of 122 805 tons, 76.9% lower than the 20-year average of 81 905 tons, and 71.5% lower than the 10-year average of 66 247 tons.

A provincial perspective
The Free State, North West, Limpopo and Northern Cape produce most of the groundnut crops in South Africa. During the 2018/19 production season, 57.4% of the plantings occurred in the Free State, followed by North West (27.4%), Limpopo (9.2%) and the Northern Cape (6%).

Currently, the expected harvest in the Free State is estimated at 8 625 tons (46%), followed by Limpopo with 3 885 tons (21%), North West with 3 850 tons (20%) and the Northern Cape with 2 520 tons (13%).

The estimated area under groundnuts in the province is 11 500ha, which is 47.7% lower than the 22 000ha that was planted in 2018. It is also 7 100ha less than the average area of 18 600ha for the past five years.

North West
It is estimated that the area under groundnuts in North West this year is 5 500ha, which is 80.4% lower than the 28 000ha that was planted in 2018. It is also 16 900ha below the average of 22 400ha for the past five years.

The fifth production estimate for groundnut production in North West for 2019 is 3 850 tons. This is the smallest yield since 2016, when only 3 320 tons were produced. It also indicates a decline of 82.1% compared to 2018 (21 500 tons). The yield is 82% smaller than the average yield of 21 384 tons for the past five years.

Free State
The estimated area under groundnuts in the Free State is 11 500ha, which is 47.7% lower than the 22 000ha that was planted in 2018. It is also 7 100ha less than the average area of 18 600ha for the past five years.

The fifth production estimate for groundnuts in the Free State this season is 8 625 tons. This is the smallest yield since 2016, when only 2 920 tons were produced.

Limpopo
The area under groundnuts in Limpopo this year is estimated at 1 850ha, which is 47.1% lower than the 3 500ha that were planted in 2018. It is also 870ha less than the average area of 2 720ha for the past five years. The current production estimate of groundnuts in Limpopo is 3 885 tons, which is 47.1% lower than in 2018 (7 350 tons).

This year’s yield is 7.3% less than the five-year average of 4 190 tons.

Northern Cape
It is estimated that the area under groundnuts in the Northern Cape this year will be only 1 200ha. This is the lowest area on record and 57.1% less than the 2 800ha that was planted in 2018. In comparison with the five-year average of 5 180ha, the current plantings show a decrease of 3 980ha. This can be attributed to the expansion of pecan nut and cotton cultivation in the province.

The current production estimate for the province is 2 520 tons, which is 64% lower than the 7 000 tons produced in 2018. The 2019 harvest is also 82.5% less than the average of 14 380 tons for the past five years. As plantings in the Northern Cape occur mainly under irrigation, the decline in production can largely be attributed to the decrease in area planted over time.

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