

# Editorial

## **Drought in the United States of America: How does it affect Africa**

Those of us who have spent time in the USA either going to school, visiting or living there have been aware of the special attribute of this country of being able to feed its citizens. Something else we know is that America is very generous with their food and Americans are always ready to invite you to their home for a generous meal. America is the biggest contributor to emergency food aid worldwide and Africa, including my own county of Kenya, is a major beneficiary of this food aid. I have spent the better part of my life concerned about hunger and malnutrition issues in Africa, and whenever I get a chance, I appeal to African governments to prioritize agriculture and food security and nutrition concerns. As I have said before, governance and food security go hand in hand. We need to get our priorities right. As I write this editorial, I am in the USA, and have experienced heat in Washington DC above 100 degrees Celcius, that I have not felt anywhere in a long time. Food prices have not yet been affected, not yet, but as the drought continues to be felt across the country, there is no doubt negative impact will result in hiked food prices.

I recall watching the effects of the current drought on television and listening to a farmer with a herd of 500 dairy cattle, which are being affected already by insufficient feed and water. It reminds me of the perpetual droughts in the Horn of Africa. In the latter, however, there would already be migration of women and children, looking for food and water, and trying to escape the negative impacts of the drought.

Below, I share with you a news excerpt on the USA drought:

**“US drought worst in 25 years, food prices to rise  
By Tangi Quemener (AFP) – July, 2012**

**WASHINGTON — A drought scouring the farming heartlands of the United States is the worst for 25 years and could drive up food prices, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said Wednesday.**

**The United States is the world's biggest producer of corn and soybeans, and the warning came as some farmers warned they may be forced to harvest crops early to sell the stalks off cheaply as animal feed.**

**"I get on my knees every day and I'm saying an extra prayer now. If I had a rain prayer or a rain dance I could do, I would do it," Vilsack told reporters after briefing President Barack Obama on the crisis.**

**Vilsack revealed that 78 percent of US corn and 11 percent of soybean crops had been hit, and compared the situation to a 1988 drought that cut production by 20 percent and cost the economy tens of billions of dollars.**

**"This will result in significant increases in prices for corn. We've seen a 38 percent increase since June 1 in the price of a bushel of corn -- it's now \$7.88. A bushel of beans has risen 24 percent," he said.**

**Vilsack said the intensity of the drought was not as great as in 1988 but 61 percent of the country is affected, a much larger area than 25 years ago.**

**"Part of the problem we're facing is that weather conditions were so good at the beginning of the season that farmers got in the field early," he warned"**



By [Karl Plume](#) and [Deborah Zabarenko](#)

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When America has been affected economically, most of the world too has been. Currently, more than 25% of America's corn goes to ethanol production. A substantial amount goes to animal feed. Increasingly, a smaller amount goes to food aid. With climate changes going the way we do not understand, is it not time for us to rethink our strategies of feeding people? Is this not a wake-up call for our African leaders, that we no longer should sit back and expect outsiders to feed the continent? Africa has the potential to not only improve its own food security situation, but can also feed others. America subsidizes its farmers; why does Africa not subsidize its own farmers who are a lot more vulnerable, with tiny plots of less than half hectare of land? Already, the US government is worried about the food security for her own people, and I am sure are engaging farmers to understand their predicament with a view to supporting them. The drought events that have dogged Africa for decades are now on the American continent. Climate change impacts are global and no one is spared. How to cope is the issue here.

Let us all unite to find coping solutions to what appears to be a major crisis ahead: **world hunger.**

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