



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2018, Ghent

“Global food security and food safety:
The role of universities”

Wheat Production and Imports in the Sudan: Are We Getting the Policy Right?

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Abstract

Wheat is a main food staple in the Sudan, especially for people living in the northern part and urban areas of the country. Wheat crop develops best at temperatures of 10–24°C and normally needs between 110 and 130 days between planting and harvest (Bayer AG, 2018). In the Sudan, therefore, it can only be grown in the coolest months of the year; hence, its planting period is mid-October to mid-November, with later sowing leading to negative impact on its productivity. According the World Bank Group (2018), the average temperature in the Sudan of the months (October -January) during the period 1991 and 2015 was 24.05°C. This implies that wheat must be grown only at high altitudes or face productivity challenges. Wheat average yield in Sudan is 2.5^{ton}/hectare compared to the world average of about 2.8^{ton}/hectare. Nonetheless, the Sudanese government insists on increasing its domestic production with the aim of reducing its importation that is associated with a heavy import subsidy bill (Siddig, 2016).

In this study, we look at the trends, fluctuations and determinants of wheat import demand in the Sudan during the period between 1996 and 2016. Three different policies were implemented to imports in 1991–1995, 1996–2014 and 2015–2016. We use descriptive analysis, a linear trend model, and a Semi-Log Model to analyse the development of its imports until 2016, while estimating a demand function for wheat imports to determine the factors influencing wheat grain and flour imports. Results reveal that a liberalised import policy encourages flour importation at the cost of grain imports, while a monopolised policy encourages wheat grain importation at the cost of wheat flour imports and domestically produced wheat grain.

Keywords: Determinants, liberalisation, Monopoly, production, the Sudan, Wheat imports