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## Small-scale cotton farmers' challenges



[Photo: Landbouweekblad archive](#)

*The sixth harvest estimate for cotton shows a slight increase in the number of fibre bales expected, following some farmers' experience of higher yields on dry land as well as under irrigation.*

*By Nico van Burick*

The crop is still being harvested, and according to June's market report, it remains unclear whether the higher yields will compensate for the loss of cotton due to the floods.

Dr. Annette Bennett, CEO of [Cotton SA](#), notes that while the price is currently slightly low, the yield increase per hectare for seed cotton may offset this for producers. The average South African price between 30 May and 27 June, based on the world price ([Cotlook A index](#)), ranged from R30.80/kg to R30.86/kg.

"There is always a market for our South African cotton, and that is why most is exported."

She mentions South Africa does not export cotton, fabric or clothing to the United States. Therefore, [President Donald Trump's increased tariffs](#) should have no impact on the local cotton industry.

Small-Scale Sector Challenges

The estimate for small-scale production still stands at 4 746 bales of fibre and harvesting is still ongoing. In the Nkomazi in Mpumalanga, the number of hectares under dryland conditions is 414 ha, and the total number of hectares for small-scale farmers is estimated at 3 375 ha. The number of small-scale farmers is estimated at 2 047.

Bennett says it remains to be seen whether cotton can outperform other crops for small-scale farmers at this late stage in the season.

Small-scale farmers' biggest problem is access to finance for their production costs, as well as access to land with title deeds that can facilitate financing.

#### **Production Figures and Regional Performance**

The expected production now stands at 66 149 fibre bales of 200kg each, as opposed to the fifth estimate's 63 660 bales. This is 27% lower than the previous season's 90 118 bales of fibre.

This can be attributed in particular to the number of hectares planted, now standing at 12 672 ha in total. That compares with the previous season's 18 385 ha, which was 31% more.

For the latest estimate, the number of hectares under irrigation is 5 975 ha and 6 667 ha on dry land.

The lower plantings are mainly attributed to the late rains, which were subsequently followed by the excessive rainfall in February. Bennett says a good development is that the ginnery on the Springbok plain is now operational, and to date, about 1 200 bales of fibre are expected from this ginnery.

She says it is encouraging that this ginnery's services will also be available in the next season.

According to her, dryland production in the Schweizer-Reneke area also looks exceptionally good, and some irrigation farmers in Groblersdal have reported larger-than-expected crops.

A recent workshop highlighted the potential of cotton production. More information can be found on Cotton SA's website, <https://cottonsa.org.za>.



**Photo for illustrative purposes: Getty Images**

#### **Global Market Outlook**

**According to the market report, global production is still higher than global consumption. Production is estimated at about 25.9 million tonnes of fibre, and consumption amounts to about 25.6 million tonnes. A decrease in U.S. production is anticipated due to excessive rainfall and planting delays.**

**The possibility is also mentioned that international political tensions may affect consumer consumption and demand, and it remains to be seen what the impact of the tariffs will be on trade.**