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➤ Commercial Farmers

Early Irrigated crop

April 2026 marked the start of the marketing phase for Zambia's irrigated Flue-Cured Virginia tobacco crop. Overall crop performance remained favourable, supported by good agronomic conditions earlier in the season, adequate irrigation water availability on most commercial farms, and strong market readiness. Industry projections indicate continued growth in production and participation, with a positive outlook for both yields and farmer returns.

Crop Development Status

- **Growth Stage:** By early April, the irrigated crop was largely in advanced harvesting, curing, and grading stages, with most early planted fields reaped / harvested.
- **Crop Condition:** Crop quality is reported as good to excellent, with uniform leaf structure, acceptable colour, and minimal disease incidence.
- **Yield Outlook:** Irrigated tobacco continues to outperform rain-fed crops in consistency, with indications of higher leaf weight and improved grades, partly due to controlled water supply.
- **Regional Performance:** Key production areas such as Southern and Central Provinces reported strong field performance and high farmer satisfaction.

Weather and Irrigation

- **Weather Conditions:** The 2025/2026 season benefited from favourable rainfall patterns earlier in the cycle, supporting both irrigated and rain-fed crops.
- **Irrigation:**
 - Adequate water reserves were maintained on most commercial farms.
 - Irrigation ensured stable growth despite localized weather variability.
 - April was a temperate month, with minimal rainfall as summer reached its end, with the season transitioning from a warm wet summer to the start of a drier cooler winter climate.
 - Light scattered rains during the beginning and middle of the month improved the small amount of late-season tobacco, which remained in the field, resulting in delayed maturation, harvesting, and curing, particularly for small-scale growers. In contrast, commercial farmers remain on schedule to sort, grade, and deliver their crop to market.
- **Constraints:** Intermittent power supply challenges (load shedding) continued to affect irrigation scheduling and curing operations in some areas.

Harvesting and Curing

- **Harvest Progress:** Majority of irrigated tobacco had been harvested or was nearing completion by mid-to-late April.
- **Curing Operations:** Active curing ongoing across all regions. Conditions were generally favourable for curing, with stable humidity aiding leaf quality.
- **Quality Indicators:** Good leaf texture and colour development observed. Minimal curing losses reported.

Marketing and Sales

The official tobacco marketing season opened on April 13, 2026.

- **Market readiness included:**
 - 16 licensed buyers and 25 sales floors nationwide, improving farmer access to markets .
- **Early market indicators show:**
 - Strong buyer participation
 - Competitive pricing environment
 - Efficient decentralised sales system
 - Irrigated tobacco continues to play a critical role in early supply to the market and quality consistency, often achieving higher yields per hectare compared to dryland crops.

Key Challenges

- **Energy Constraints:** Load shedding affecting irrigation pumps and curing barns.
- **Input Costs:** Rising costs of fuel, fertilizers, and labour impacting margins.
- **Climate Risks:** Although mitigated by irrigation, localized weather events (e.g., hailstorms) posed minor risks.

Opportunities

- Expansion of irrigated production due to reliable yields and higher profitability.
- Improved market access through decentralized sales floors.
- Strong demand from multiple buyers ensuring market security for growers.

Outlook for May 2026

- Marketing activities will intensify, with increased volumes reaching sales floors.
- Final harvesting and curing expected to conclude shortly.
- Continued firm demand and stable pricing anticipated.
- Focus will begin shifting toward:
 - End-of-season grading
 - Field clean-up
 - Preparations for the 2026/2027 crop cycle (Early Crop June)

Conclusion

The irrigated tobacco crop in Zambia for April 2026 demonstrates a strong and stable performance, characterized by good crop quality, efficient marketing systems, and expanding farmer participation. Despite operational challenges such as energy constraints, the sector remains robust and on track for a successful marketing season, reinforcing its importance in Zambia's agricultural economy.

Commercial Irrigated Crop Southern Region (Mkushi) CY26



Commercial Dryland Tobacco Crop

Seasonal Overview (Rainfed Tobacco)

- The 2025/26 season has been highly favourable for dryland tobacco, driven by consistent and well-distributed rainfall, good humidity conditions for curing.
- The Tobacco Board of Zambia reported “excellent rainfall patterns... particularly good for rain-fed crop”, supporting strong field performance.

Dryland tobacco has benefited significantly from weather conditions, unlike previous drought-affected seasons.

Crop Condition Assessment Status (April 2026)

- By April: Most dryland tobacco is at harvesting and curing stages, curing conditions reported as favourable (adequate humidity and temperatures)
- Field observations indicate: Good leaf formation and colour development, minimal widespread weather damage (isolated hail reported)

Leaf quality potential is above average, especially for flue-cured Virginia tobacco.

Crop Condition Assessment**Leaf Quality**

- Generally fair to very good
- Supported by:
 - Stable rainfall
 - Good curing conditions
 - Some over conditioned tobacco, rejected on markets
- Expect:
 - Improved leaf grade distribution
 - Higher proportion of middle and upper leaf quality

Yield Performance

- Farmers report: Better crop performance vs 2025 season
- Expansion in cultivated area also boosting output

Pricing Outlook

- Early signals: Competitive prices expected, though dependent on global demand
- Key uncertainty: Global tobacco price trends may moderate revenue despite higher volumes

Key Production Drivers (Dryland Systems)

- Rainfall performance → primary success factor in 2026
- Contract farming models: Provide inputs, extension, and assured markets
- Improved inputs: Shift toward locally tailored fertilisers improving yields and quality

Risks & Constraints**Short-Term (2026 Season)**

- Rising input and labour costs, fuel hike.

Structural Risks

Dependence on: Export markets and global pricing cycles

Production constraints: High curing costs (fuel / wood) and labour intensity

Sector Outlook (Commercial Perspective)

- Tobacco remains: A high-value cash crop with strong export potential
- 2026 outlook: Strong production year and likely increase in foreign exchange earnings
- Medium-term: Continued expansion driven by: Contract farming, Export Demand, Industry investment

Summary (Commercial Dryland Tobacco – April 2026)

- **Season quality:** Excellent for rainfed tobacco
- **Crop stage:** Harvesting & curing
- **Yield outlook:** Average to above average
- **Leaf quality:** Good to very good
- **Production:** ~80+ million kg (rising trend)
- **Market:** Well-structured, competitive buying environment
- **Key risk:** Global price volatility despite strong output

Commercial Irrigated Crop Southern Region (Mkushi) CY26

Small scale - Project Tobacco (Dryland)

- Most smallholder farmers (especially in Eastern, Central, and parts of Lusaka Province) completed harvesting by late March.
- April activities focused on curing (flue-cured Virginia tobacco) and initial sorting and grading.
- Yield estimates:
 - Generally average to slightly above average compared to 2025.
 - Good rainfall distribution earlier in the season supported leaf development.
 - Some localized late-season dry spells slightly reduced leaf weight in sandy soils.

Weather & Agronomic Conditions

- Rainfall tapered off by late March.
- April conditions:
 - Mostly dry and warm, ideal for curing.
 - Minimal reports of flooding or major weather shocks, Hail & Strong winds.
- Pest/disease pressure: Moderate earlier in season (notably aphids and leaf spot), but manageable with standard practices.

Curing & Post-Harvest

- Majority of smallholders rely on: Wood-fired barns, raising ongoing concerns about deforestation and fuel costs.
- Key issues: Rising cost of firewood/alternative fuel, inconsistent curing quality among less experienced growers.
- Overall leaf quality: fair to good, with brighter leaf grades where curing was well managed.

Market & Pricing Trends

- Marketing season begins (contract floors opened 20/4/2026)
- Key dynamics: Prices expected to be moderate but stable, influenced by global demand and exchange rates
- Challenges:
 - Limited bargaining power for independent smallholders
 - Dependence on contractors for inputs and guaranteed markets

Outlook (May-July 2026)

- Peak marketing period expected
- Prices will depend on: Global leaf demand (especially from Asia) and quality consistency



Small-scale Sales Floor

Project Growers Crops at Various Stages Throughout the Country



Zambian Tobacco Leaf Crop Cycle

PROVINCE	Transplanting %	Topped %	Reaped %
Northern Region	100 %	100 %	100 %
Western Region	100 %	100 %	100 %
Central Region	100 %	100 %	100 %
Eastern Region	100 %	100 %	100 %
Southern Region	100 %	100 %	100 %

➤ Tobacco Varieties and Proportion CY26

- 30% = Seed varieties KRK66, KRK26, KRK29—from Zimbabwe Tobacco Seed Association and Kutsaga.
- 70% = Seed varieties CC35, CC13, K326—from Cross Creek Seed Suppliers in United States of America.

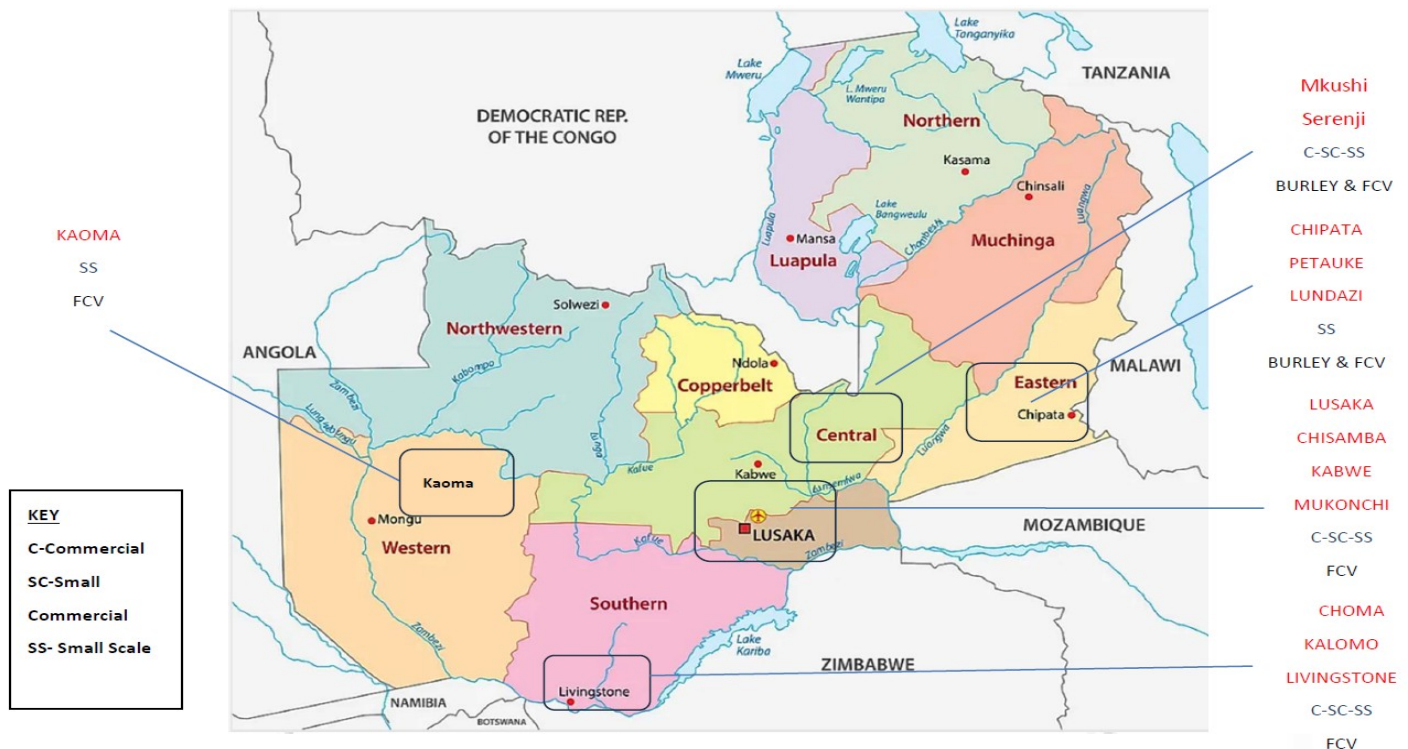
➤ Crop Forecast - CY26 Projected Volumes

- Zambia's National crop size for this year is anticipated to be between 57 & 62 million kilograms.
- Zambian Burley volume estimated availability this season 700 tons, green.
- The 2026 marketing season officially opened on April 13, with Commercial deliveries starting from the 7th of April in preparations for sales.
- Small-scale floors opened on the 20 April 2026.

➤ Crop Calendar 2026

Crop Status	Seedbeds	Transplanting	Topping	Harvesting	Curing	Buying	Processing
January							
February							
March							
April						Started	
May						Mid-April 2026	Started
June	Started 1-06-2025						Mid-May 2026
July							
August							
September		Started 1-09-2025					
October							
November			Started 1-11-2025				
December				Started 1-12-2025	Started 1-12-2025		

➤ Zambian FCV & Burley tobacco growing map, Commercial and Small Scale.



➤ Political and Economic Update

Political Update

- **Party Strength:** The United Party for National Development (UPND), led by President Hakainde Hichilema, is consolidating influence ahead of the August 13, 2026, general election. Its platform emphasizes “Economic Restoration” with visible grassroots investments.
- **Opposition Dynamics:** Political opposition is fragmented but coalescing into two primary blocs:
 - Tonse Alliance (PF) now led by Given Lubinda after Edgar Lungu’s passing, focusing on infrastructure expansion and middle-class affordability.
 - People’s Pact (Socialist) maintaining a populist critique of the ruling party’s policies.
- **Electoral System Implications:** Zambia’s new Mixed Member Proportional Representation may produce a more fragmented Parliament, complicating post-election policy implementation.
- **Election Milestones:**
 - February 2026: Provisional voters register inspection
 - May 15, 2026: Parliament dissolved; official campaign begins
 - August 13, 2026: General election

Economy Update

1. Economic Growth

- **GDP:** Projected growth 6.4 - 6.5%, driven primarily by a resurgence in copper production (>1 million metric tons) and stabilization in agriculture after prior climate shocks.
- **Mining Sector:** Major investments from Barrick Gold, First Quantum Minerals, and a \$1.1 billion refinery project enhance energy security and copper output.
- **Agriculture:** Benefiting from improved rainfall; supports rural incomes and food security.
- **Energy:** Diversifying from hydro to solar and coal (notable \$900M Amsons Group investment) to reduce climate-related risks.

2. Economic Growth

- **Budget:** Total expenditure K253.1 billion; strict fiscal discipline targets a 2.1% GDP deficit.
- **Debt:** Debt-to-GDP projected at ~68%; debt servicing absorbs over 36% of the budget.
- **Inflation:** Expected to average 7.7–9.2%, returning to the Bank of Zambia target band.
- **Currency:** Kwacha remains stable, supported by strong export revenues.

3. Social Spending

- **Education:** K33.04 billion allocated (13.1% of budget), including free primary & secondary tuition, school feeding programs for 4.6 million students, and recruitment of 3,500 new teachers.
- **Health:** K26.17 billion (10.3% of budget), with 2,500 new personnel, increased funding for essentials, maternity care, and rural mini hospitals.
- **Social Protection:** Slight decrease to K15.67 billion due to phasing out drought relief funds.

4. Cost of Living and Social Impact

- High living costs persist despite macroeconomic recovery.
- Expanded Social Cash Transfer covers 1.5 million households, largely funded domestically.
- Poverty remains widespread, notably rural areas (~78% below poverty line).

5. Financial Markets and Investment

- Lusaka Securities Exchange activity rising; IPO oversubscriptions indicate renewed domestic and regional investor interest
- Copper prices remain strong (~\$10,000/ton), supporting trade balance and investor confidence.
- Mining investment decisions may be delayed due to election-related uncertainty and potential policy shifts.

6. Geopolitical and International Trade

- Strategic partnerships in both Western and Eastern markets, participation in the global critical minerals race, and rehabilitated regional infrastructure (TAZARA railway, TAZAMA pipeline) enhance trade connectivity.

Election-Year Considerations

- Heightened grassroots spending (CDF K40M per constituency) to consolidate support.
- Tight fiscal management is required to maintain IMF program compliance and debt stability.
- The cost of living remains central to opposition messaging.

Indicator	Projected Value
Real GDP Growth	6.4–6.5%
Inflation (Average)	7.7–9.2%
Budget Deficit	~2.1% of GDP
Copper Production	>1,000,000 Tons
Debt-to-GDP	~68%

Key Summary Indicators: 2026

Conclusion

- Zambia in April 2026 is positioned at a political and economic crossroads: macroeconomic recovery, mining led growth, and strategic fiscal management are counterbalanced by high poverty, social service demands, and the pressures of an imminent general election.
- The UPND government leverages economic achievements and localized spending to reinforce electoral support, while opposition coalitions contest the cost-of living impact and advocate alternative economic policies.

➤ Exchange Rate – As of 5th May 2026

U.S. Dollar	Chinese	Zambian	British	Euro	Zimbabwe
USD 1.00	RMB 6.82	ZK 18.90	GBP 0.74	EUR 0.85	ZIG 25.76

End of Report