

Global staples take centre stage in South Africa

Maize has long been one of the staple foods of South Africa, and rice has always been a mainstay of traditional African dishes. Rice has universal appeal and is part and parcel of grocery cupboards across the LSM spectrum in this country. Globally, rice and maize comprise two of the top three food crops, according to Ricepedia, with wheat rounding out this powerhouse. It's safe to say these two staple foods are big business.

Traditionally speaking, consumers have grown up with either one or both of these foods making regular appearances at the dinner table, with

convenience, ease of preparation, availability, shelf-life, and versatility all make these staples a personal choice as much as a calorific necessity.

In an article for South Africa Online entitled *Uses of Maize; Field Crops in South Africa*, Glenneis Kriel writes that

"Due to the growing middle-class, there has been a shift towards other staples, such as bread, rice,



potatoes and pasta.

The shift has also led to a bigger demand for animal protein, such as meat, dairy and eggs, which in turn has caused a growing demand for maize in the feed market."

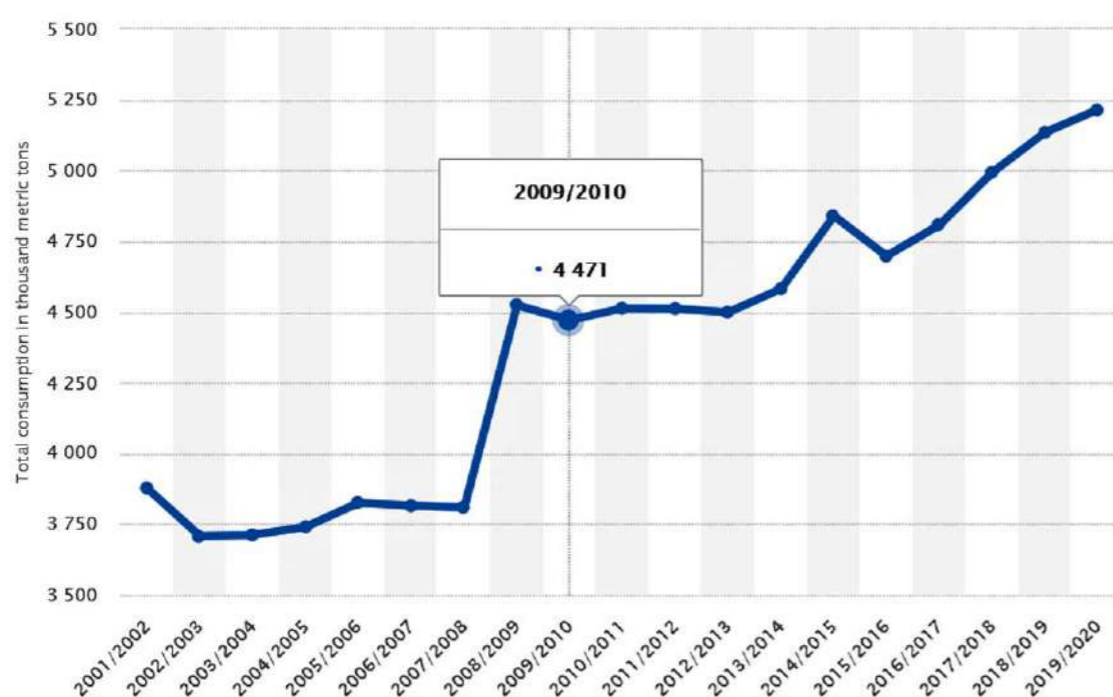
However, despite the growing popularity of alternative staples (including rice), maize and maize products retain the lion's share of the consumer market and are often bought in bulk and/or on promotion.

Meanwhile, Food & Wine predicted that, thanks to the pandemic,

two of the biggest trends for 2021 would be a return to comfort food and an upswing in heritage dishes, both at home and on restaurant menus. Foods like pap, polenta, cornbread, corn on the cob, rice pudding, yellow rice, hearty stews, and casseroles served with a side of rice, as well as paellas, jollof, homemade biryanis and curries all make the cut, which is good news for producers and retailers alike.

But the appeal isn't only one of nostalgia and a need for comfort. In trying times, dried grains such as rice, and grain products such as polenta and maize meal keep well. With many consumers

South Africa consumption of processed maize 2001-2020 (in 1 000 metric tons)



either unwilling or unable to make frequent trips to the shops during the pandemic, products that can be bought in bulk and stored for extended periods are ideal. These products also tend to be versatile, a boon for home cooks faced with endless meal planning.

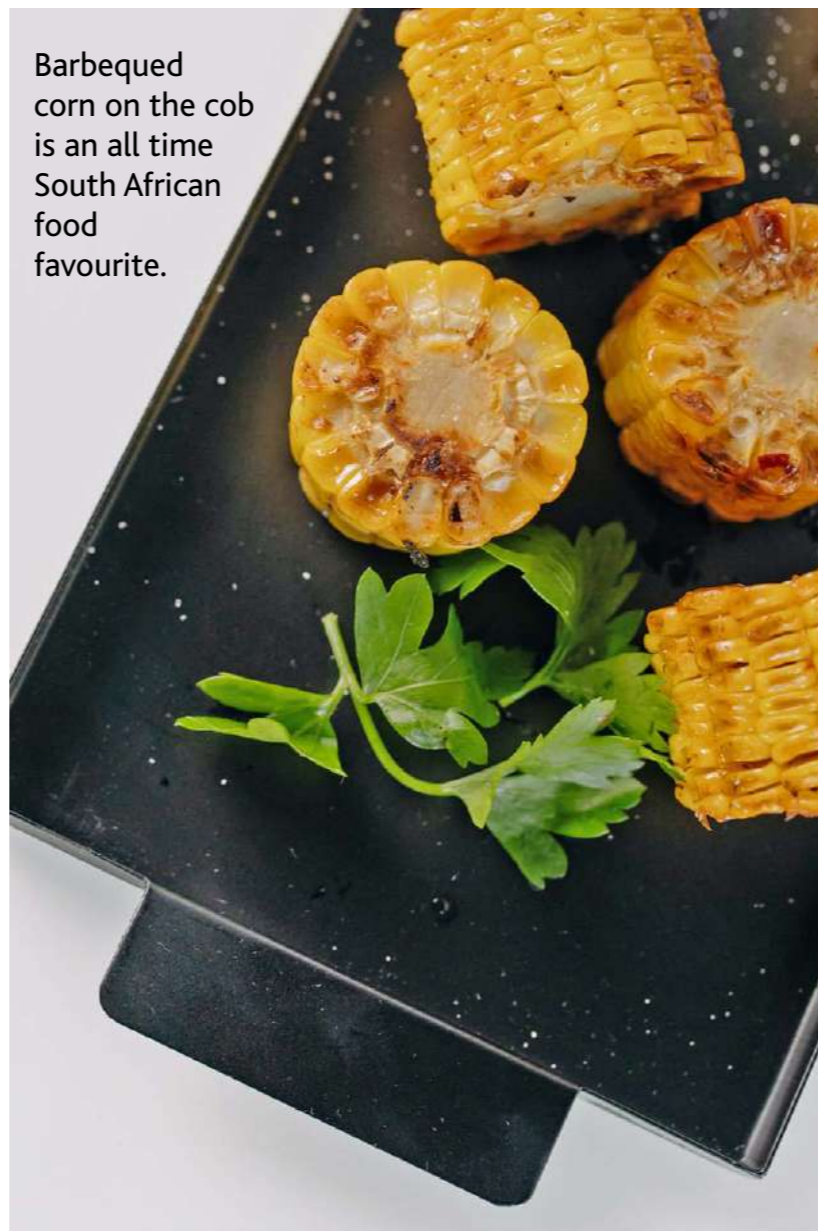
Convenience is also key, particularly for over-worked parents and a population that is slightly more wary of eating out than it used to be. Quick cook polenta, rice sides that microwave in 90 seconds, and microwave meals with a rice base – either as single servings or for the whole family – remain popular with middle to high LSM consumers.

This is evidenced by the growing number of own brand meal ranges, and the variety of dishes on offer in these ranges. Home-schooling and work-from-home situations are also good for maize-based snack foods such as popcorn, and corn chips such as Doritos and Niknaks, as well as rice cakes, rice crackers, and puffed rice cereal bars.

“ There has also been a myriad of innovations in the maize category ... challenging the perception that maize meal is only used in traditional, pap-based meals ... suitable for many starters, main meals and desserts. ”

Quick-cook maize meal, instant maize porridge in flavours like vanilla, banana, strawberry and chocolate, maize rice, and maize with added fibre

Barbequed corn on the cob is an all time South African food favourite.



are other innovations driving growth in the maize category.

Another factor to consider is the consumer's expanding palate. International inspiration is here to stay. South Africa has always been something of a melting pot, embracing people and cultures from around the world. The makings for traditional African dishes, local twists on Indian staples, Tex-Mex and nouveau Mexican flavours, westernised sushi, Asian favourites, and European comfort foods are all becoming more and more easily available,

as home cooks demand the ingredients needed to recreate their favourite international dishes. Consumers expect easy access to varieties such as basmati, jasmine, risotto, and sushi rice. Flavoured rices and rice paired with ingredients such as legumes, ancient grains, or sundried tomatoes are also proving increasingly popular.

Technology is also helping consumers to use their rice and maize products in innovative recipes, with retailers and manufacturers constantly providing new ideas to incorporate the products into meal ideas via their websites and social feeds including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Another driver of rice and maize consumption is gluten.

“ The gluten-free foods category continues to grow as more people come to believe they are gluten sensitive, gluten intolerant, or completely allergic to gluten. ”



There are several theories regarding the cause of this increase in gluten-related health issues, but the fact of the matter is, many consumers are starting to move away from gluten-heavy products and towards naturally gluten-free grains such as maize and rice, amongst others.



Whilst South Africa is expecting a bumper grain crop this year, imports from Thailand and Vietnam may be affected by the Covid 19 pandemic as they were in 2020. The United States Department of Agriculture issued a report in 2020 highlighting the effect of lockdown precautions on international exports, rising prices, and the local government freeze on price increases for staples such as rice. Consumers in South Africa have yet to be faced with a significant shortage, however.

In short, many South African consumers depend on rice and maize

products to provide the bulk of their daily food requirements. For others, these products are traditional staples essential to family recipes and comfort foods. The rise in convenience products is driving consumption in younger members of the buying force and increasingly attracts consumers looking for ease, convenience, and time-saving products. It's a safe bet that both the rice and maize categories will continue to see growth into the very long-term future. **SR**



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