

Consumer Watch

CUTS[®]
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EDITORIAL

Government Cautions Maize Buyers against Using Uncertified Scales

The Zambian Government has cautioned maize buyers against using uncertified scales in the purchase of maize or risk having their scales confiscated and fined. Zambia Weights and Measures Agency (ZWMA) Engineer, Micheal Kalumbu said his agency has embarked on a countrywide operation to inspect whether the maize buyers are using verified scales in a bid to promote fair trade between farmers and buyers. ZWMA is a statutory body under the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry established by the weights and measures Act number 12 of 2003. This body aims to regulate all trade measurements in the country in order to protect consumers.



Kalumbu explained that by law, maize buyers in Zambia are required to use ZWMA-certified scales to ensure that fair trade is promoted. “One of our mandate as Zambia Weights and Measures Agency is to ensure that fair trade is promoted between a farmer and a buyer, so that a farmer can have value for his or her money”, Kalumbu said.

Kalumbu further appealed to farmers to ensure that they weigh their maize for sale only on scales, which have ZWMA-approved stickers and calibrations to avoid being swindled. The ZWMA Engineer said that ZWMA will continue to support farmers by ensuring the accuracy of weighing and measuring instruments.

He revealed that his agency has partnered with the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission, and the Zambia National Service to carry out random inspections countrywide to make sure that scales used by maize buyers meet the requirements.

He explained that this exercise is in response to complaints by farmers who were swindled continuously in some parts of the country by maize buyers who used inaccurate scales.

(Lusaka Times, 10.10.16)

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NEWS

Lower Income Earners will Suffer More from Fuel Price Hike: CUTS

CUTS Lusaka (Zambia) stated that low income households will be worst hit by the increased prices of fuel. In a press statement issued in Lusaka, CUTS Lusaka noted that recent hike in fuel prices by the Energy Regulation Board (ERB) would undoubtedly trigger a high cost of living.

On October 14, 2016 the ERB increased petrol pump price to K13.70 per litre from K9.87, diesel to K11.40 from K8.59 and kerosene to



K8.03 from K6.12. Low sulphur diesel is currently costing K13.69 per litre from K10.88. "Given the country's current fiscal position, CUTS is aware that stringent measures need to be taken. However, it is important to realise that measures that will strain the country's consumer base will have a negative impact on their spending capacity and their contribution to the growth of the economy", CUTS stated.

(The Post, 29.11.16)

Silent and Healthy Competition in African Fresh Food Market

Armed with new food safety knowledge and insights from Zambian consumers, informal and open fresh food markets have become preferred destinations for the majority of consumers.



Imported fruit and vegetables are also finding their way into these markets, such as Mbare Musika in Harare. While the definition of quality remains elusive for academics and researchers, traders, who specialise in fresh fruit and vegetables, have mastered the full parameters of quality and freshness in ways that can convince consumers. Thus, supermarkets are no longer the only ones associated with high quality fresh food.

In fact, many consumers, who find refrigerated fruit and vegetables tasteless, prefer open markets, where agricultural commodities are delivered straight from the farm. A recent survey by market-oriented consultancy eMKambo in Harare discovered that many consumers now believe that commodities like potatoes, cabbages, tomatoes and a wide range of fresh fruits are better procured from open market. Vendors, who buy for resale, find open market the best choice in terms of price, quality, convenience and diversity of fresh commodities.

(Newsday, 26.10.16)

CUTS Urges Government to Tackle High Inflation

CUTS Lusaka has advised the Zambian Government to critically look at reducing the country's inflation rate, which still stands at over 20 percent. CUTS stated that the Zambian

Government should focus on retaining low and stable inflation rates to reduce the cost of living.

“Between 2009 and 2011, the inflation rate was consistently under 10 percent. According to the Central Statistics Office, as on June 2016, the official inflation rate had gone up to 21.3 percent. CUTS is calling for the Zambian Government to retain a focus on low and stable inflation rates”, CUTS added.

CUTS also mentioned that according to perception surveys conducted both internally and by other key institutions over the years, tackling high inflation rates, improving the



accessibility and affordability of mobile phone and Internet services, ensuring manageable fuel and electricity prices, among others, had remained a huge challenge. CUTS also noted that poor consumers, who remain the most disadvantaged in Zambia, were usually left at the mercy of product and service providers.

(The Post, 24.08.16)

SA Faces Water Rationing as Dam Levels Drop after Drought

South Africa (SA) will experience water rationing if consumers do not paid heed to calls to reduce consumption to avoid a collapse of the



water system as dam levels fall after a drought, an South African official in the water department said.

Concerns over water supply in Africa’s most industrialised country have risen after an El Nino weather pattern brought drought conditions to most part of Southern Africa, hurting agriculture output. The department of water had asked municipalities to cut water supply by 15 percent to preserve dam levels, but said the response had been poor.

SA Water and Sanitation Minister Nomvula Mokonyane said failure to reduce water use would “trigger the next level of interventions” to avoid the collapse of the water system. On being asked what the next level would be, the Minister said: “The next level will be rationing, which in turn has consequence referred to as ‘shedding’. The urgency of saving 15 percent cannot be over emphasised. It is critical”. The water supply disruptions would be akin to power cuts – known locally as load shedding, such as those imposed by SA power utility Eskom after it faced supply problems.

(Reuters, 13.10.16)