

# Milk, meat, sugar and bread: The impact of the KZN riots

**fin24**

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- **The riots and looting in KwaZulu-Natal will have a knock-on effect on local food supplies.**
- **The closure of the N3 highway, fuel shortages, absenteeism and disruptions at Durban harbour were among the biggest problems.**
- **The provision of milk, bread, meat and sugar has been affected.**

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Parts of South Africa have begun cleaning up after a devastating looting spree that gripped KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, but the ripple effect will be felt in the country's food value chains for months to come.

The lengthy closure of the key N3 highway linking Durban and Gauteng, as well as fuel shortages, have severely disrupted the food supply chain.

"In South Africa, a notable share of agricultural goods is transported by road. For instance, in the grain industry, on average, 75% of production is transported by road," agricultural experts Marlene Louw, Tracy Davids, Wandile Sihlobo and Kandas Cloete say in an essay.

The Durban harbour has also been affected by the riots, which means that the entry of fertilisers, cereals, animal and vegetable fats, plastics and plastic products, into South Africa has been affected - which will hit the production of food.

In addition, many workers in the agricultural sector in KwaZulu-Natal have not been able to come to work, further exacerbating the problems.

The impact of the crisis on supplies of bread, milk, meat and sugar is among the biggest concerns.

## **Bread**

Anchor Yeast's main yeast factory is located in Durban, which supplies bread bakeries across the country.

Because of the long closure of the N3 - which was only reopened on Friday - there were problems with getting yeast delivered from Durban to major bakeries in Gauteng, and due to the impact of the riots on operations at Durban harbour, there is difficulty getting imported wheat to millers in KwaZulu-Natal to produce flour.

- **READ** | [Key SA railway line still being cleared of looting debris, Transnet says](#)

John Purchase, CEO of the agricultural business chamber Agbiz, says that two consignments of wheat, that needs to be processed into flour for bread, have been stuck on ships in Durban harbour.

He is worried about potential sporadic shortages of bread as bakeries in KwaZulu-Natal have either shut down or are working at 50% capacity, mainly because employees cannot get to work.

Purchase added: "There are problems across the food supply chain from production to storage, manufacturing and distribution. The biggest problem is distribution because some roads are still closed and in some areas in KwaZulu-Natal the only shops have been destroyed. The best news is that the N3 is opening and that will alleviate a lot of supply pressure."

## **Sugar**

Some of South Africa's sugarcane fields were set alight and supply chain disruptions as well as security concerns resulted in producers closing their mills. Thomas Funke, CEO of SA Canegrowers Association, said farmers have lost more than 430 000 tons of cane to fires.

- **READ** | [Dozens of malls have been looted, damaged - here's the latest list from property owners](#)

Funke said sugarcane is normally burnt before harvest to remove excess fibre but it has to be delivered to a mill for processing within a few days to avoid quality deterioration and losses.

"With the cane now burnt, canegrowers now face a race against time. If mills cannot process the cane due to unsafe roads as well as attacks on cane, sugar, and fuel trucks, then the industry will lose more than R258 million [in revenue]," he said.

In order to curb the losses, Funke said mills will have to resume their operations as soon as possible, which they are expected to do in the weekend. With regards to possible supply shortages, he said there is enough stock to meet local demand but the supply chain needs to be restored to prevent future shortages.

## **Milk**

The KwaZulu-Natal Midlands is a key milk production region and the province accounts for 27% of total South African milk production.

"Reports suggest that producers in key production areas of the province had to discard milk due to their inability to distribute it safely. Some also reported that they could not get access to feed."

Fin24 has reported on a farmer that had to throw away 28 000 litres of milk worth R160 000 because the transport company said it cannot risk its trucks on the roads.

- **[READ | Food shortages expected: One KZN farmer forced to dump 28 000 litres of milk a day amid riots](#)**

## **Meat**

Many poultry producers are still unable to send birds to abattoirs and also face challenges in getting day-old chicks and in some instances, feed, say Louw, Davids, Sihlobo and Cloete.

"The broken link between producer and abattoir results in losses as a result of feeding birds beyond their optimal slaughtering weight. It is also expected that once abattoirs open and logistical issues ease, bottlenecks will arise due to backlogs created during the height of the disruptions."

Izaak Breitenbach, general manager of the SA Poultry Association, told Fin24 that the problem is twofold: on the one hand, products cannot get to market, and on the other hand, with the hundreds of shopping centres and retail outlets having been looted and destroyed, it will be difficult to get poultry products to where it used to go even if the supply chain reopens.

"The biggest issue is the threat to food security developing as our central distribution centres are closed and not taking in anything. We slaughter about five million birds a day nationally - about 30% of these in KwaZulu-Natal - and they end up in cold storage, but the stores are getting full," said Breitenbach.

Some farms had been without feed for days this week. Hatcheries supply about four million birds per day nationally, but cannot get them to farms.

Day-old poultry stock that could not be moved to farms throughout the country for placement had to be euthanised.

- **READ | Day-old chicks euthanised as unrest leaves poultry sector with feed shortage**

According to Gerhard Neethling, general manager of the Red Meat Abattoir Association, livestock cannot get to the abattoirs and products cannot go from the abattoirs to be distributed due to transport risks.

"To make matters worse, the disruptions come in an area in which foot-and-mouth disease-control measures are in place, complicating attempts to manage the disease. So, at this point the challenge for abattoirs is mainly logistics. In many cases the markets and butcheries have been destroyed so the impact has been across the value chain," says Neethling.

"We even know of inland abattoirs slaughtering less because the product cannot reach the market any more."

### **Don't panic buy**

Purchase told Fin24 on Friday said although there are constraints, panic buying is not necessary, especially in provinces outside KwaZulu-Natal, as this will only worsen the situation. Prof. Andre Jooste of the Department of Agricultural Economics at Stellenbosch University said at a national level South Africa has sufficient food. The current challenges are more localised in KwaZulu-Natal.

<https://www.news24.com/fin24/economy/milk-meat-sugar-and-bread-the-impact-of-the-kzn-riots-20210717>