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Corn Acreage in South America: Stable in Brazil, Sharp Decline in Argentina

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Corn production in South America's two major agricultural countries is expected to follow two distinct paths during the 2024/25 crop season. In Brazil, planted acreage is projected to remain steady, but exports are likely to drop significantly due to intensified competition in the international market. In contrast, Argentina anticipates the largest relative decrease in corn acreage in 17 years, driven by concerns over the potential impact of corn stunt disease, which severely affected fields last season. Nonetheless, Argentine corn exports are projected to reach their highest levels since the 2020/21 season. This article examines the latest forecasts for 2024/25 corn production in Brazil and Argentina, which together account for roughly 40% of global corn exports.

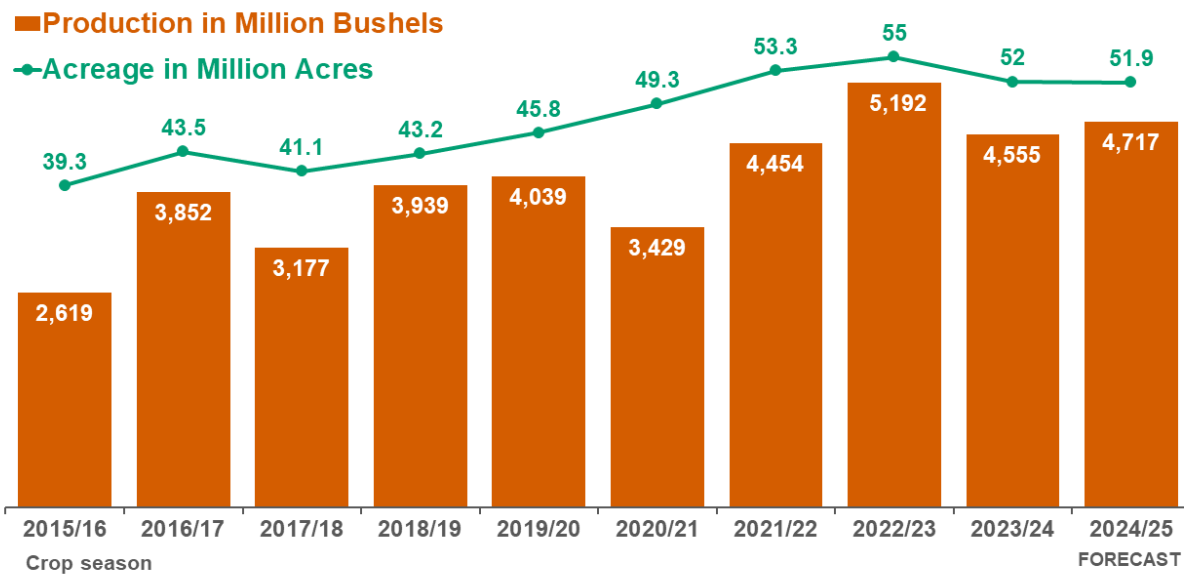
Brazil Set to Increase Production While Cutting Exports

The Brazilian food agency, National Supply Company (Conab), has increased its estimate for the country's total corn crop in the 2024/25 season to 4,717 million bushels. This forecast represents a 3.6% increase compared to last year, when adverse weather in key growing regions negatively impacted yields. If achieved, this would mark the second-largest harvest in Brazil's history, trailing only the record set during the 2022/23 season. Corn acreage for Brazil's first, second, and third crops is expected to remain stable at 52 million acres (see Figure 1).

Field activities for Brazil's first corn crop are underway, driven by favorable weather conditions in key producing regions in the South of Brazil. Brazilian farmers began planting the 2024/25 first corn crop in September. As of November 17, planting was already completed in 52% of the area, 3 percentage points ahead of the same period last year. This season, farmers are expected to allocate 9.3 million acres to the first crop, with production projected at nearly 897 million bushels—a slight decrease compared to last year. The first crop is primarily harvested between January and March in southern states.

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Figure 1. Total Corn Acreage and Production in Brazil



Brazil's second corn crop acreage is expected to remain steady at 41 million acres during the 2024/25 season, according to Conab. If weather conditions are favorable, production is projected to reach 3,725 million bushels, a 5% increase over the previous harvest, which was affected by drought in the Center-West states (*farmdoc daily*, [July 15, 2024](#)). The second crop, known as *safrinha*, must be planted within a specific timeframe—typically from January to early March—to avoid maturing during the dry season, which begins in mid-April. The *safrinha* accounts for 75% of the national production.

After surpassing the United States as the world's top corn exporter in 2023, Brazil has significantly reduced its shipments in 2024. Between January and October 2024, Brazil exported 1,211 million bushels of corn, a 27% decline compared to the same period last year, according to the Brazilian Foreign Trade Secretariat (SECEX). In 2023, Brazil's total corn exports reached 2,199 million bushels. For 2024, the National Association of Cereal Exporters projects that exports will total approximately 1,614 million bushels.

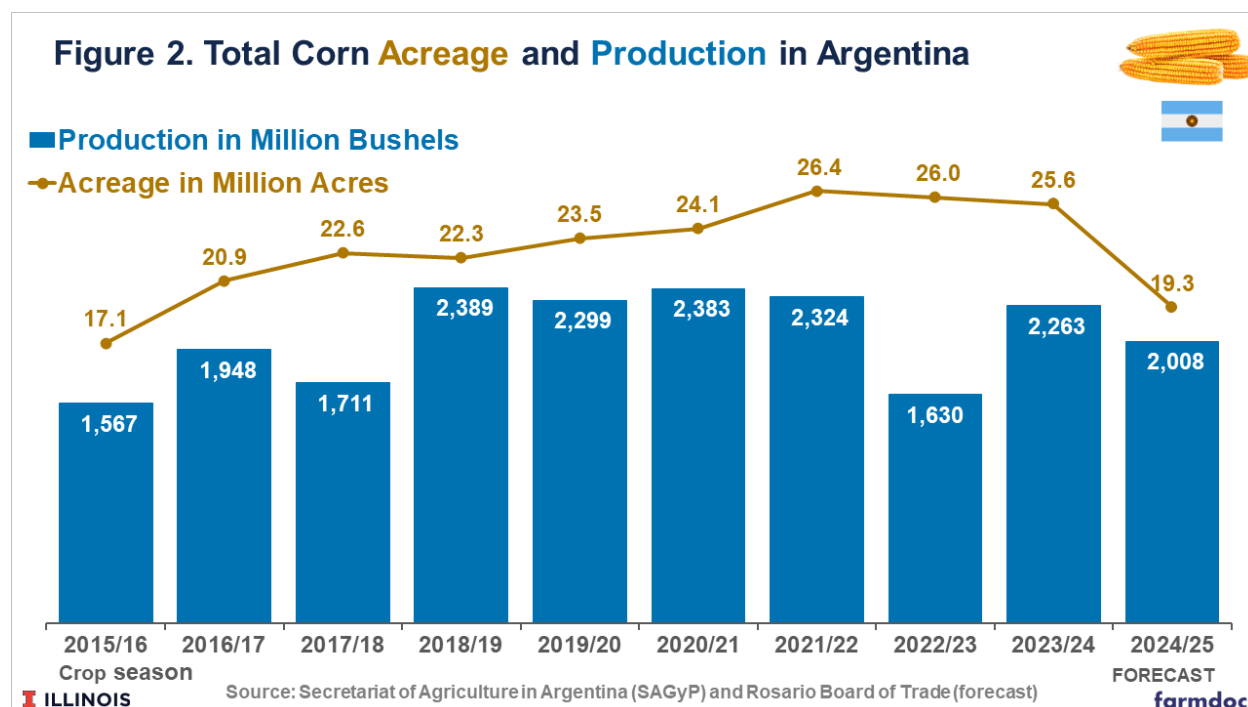
The recovery of supply in other major producing countries and the decline in Chinese demand have contributed to a slowdown in Brazil's corn exports. In addition to Argentina increasing its supply and exports (*read more in the next section*), other major corn producers, such as the United States, Europe, and Ukraine, have also expanded their production and exports. Fall is typically the period when Brazil's corn exports peak, but that trend is not happening. Meanwhile, U.S. corn export sales have been extremely strong in the past month (see *farmdoc daily*, [November 11, 2024](#)).

Among the importers that shifted away from Brazilian corn, China stands out. After being Brazil's top buyer last year—importing 635 million bushels out of the 2,199 million bushels exported—the shipment of Brazilian corn to China has fallen to less than 82 million bushels t so far this year. China has long-term objectives to achieve self-sufficiency in corn production as part of its strategy to control meat prices in the domestic market. The country has made some progress toward this goal. From August to October, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) lowered its estimate for China's international corn purchases by 157 million bushels, now forecasting 748 million bushels.

Argentina Projected to Drop Corn Area Due to Disease

Argentina's corn planted area is projected to decrease by 25% in the 2024/25 crop season, equivalent to 6 million acres, according to initial estimates from the Rosario Board of Trade. If realized, this would mark the largest relative drop in corn acreage in 17 years. Corn production grew from 2015 /16 to 2021/22. Between 2021/22 and 2023/24, corn production averaged close to 26 million bushels. The Rosario Board

of Trade estimates that the 2024/25 corn harvest will total 2,008 million bushels, an 11% decline compared to the previous season (see Figure 2).



The primary factor behind the decline in Argentina's corn planted area is the devastating impact of corn stunt disease during the previous crop season. Corn producers faced significant losses last season due to a bacterium spread by the leafhopper pest, which stunts crop growth. Many farmers lost their entire corn crop to the disease, making them particularly cautious this season. The loss in corn area will primarily be covered by soybeans which demand lower investment due to lower seed costs and less fertilizer use (see *farmdoc daily*, [October 25, 2024](#)). In previous years, corn stunt was mainly present in the country's northern region, but the 2024 season marked the first time this disease has affected Argentina's central corn production region (see *farmdoc daily*, [May 28, 2024](#)).

Argentinian farmers began planting their 2024/25 first corn crop in September, facing concerns over dry conditions driven by the La Niña phenomenon, which typically reduces rainfall in the region. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), La Niña has a 57% likelihood of developing between October and December 2024 and is expected to persist through January-March 2025. After an extended period of very dry conditions in October, rains in the last few weeks have allowed farmers to progress with corn planting. By November 14, 39% of the expected crop had been planted, six percentage points ahead of the same period last year, according to the Argentina's Secretariat of Agriculture.

Argentina's corn exports for the 2024/25 marketing year (September to August) are projected to reach 1,417 million bushels, a 9% increase compared to the previous year, according to USDA forecasts. If achieved, this would mark the highest export total since the 2020/21 season. After facing one of the worst droughts in their history in 2022/23 crop season, Argentine farmers have regained their production capacity, reasserting their position as a key player in the global corn market.

Final Considerations

Recent rainfall has improved growing conditions across South America, particularly in Argentina. However, the onset of La Niña introduces uncertainty for the remainder of the season, as the phenomenon is typically associated with hot and dry conditions in Argentina and southern Brazil. In Brazil, total corn acreage is expected to remain stable, with production projected to increase by 3.6% compared to last year, when unfavorable weather in key regions led to lower yields. Meanwhile, Argentina's corn acreage is forecasted to drop by 25% due to disease challenges last year. Despite this, Argentina has been

reclaiming its position in the global corn market, threatening to overtake Brazil as the world's second-largest exporter in the current marketing year.

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