

8.6 Agriculture

Agricultural activities are considered to be important contributors to the economy of KZN and South Africa. Some of these agriculturally related activities occur within the province's coastal zone.

The topography along the coast of KZN is generally relatively flat to undulating, making it suitable for arable cultivation and forestry. The mild, sub-tropical, frost-free climate and summer rainfall (*Section 2.1*), renders the zone very suitable for the cultivation of sugar cane, forestry and sub-tropical fruits such as bananas, litchis, mangos and paw-paws. The soil types range from well drained coastal sands to clay loams, which again favour forestry and sugar cane.

Sugar cane

Sugar cane was first planted in 1848 in the Mt Moreland area of the KZN North Coast. In 1865 a mill was erected at Amanzimtoti (south of Durban), which enabled sugar cane to be cultivated on the KZN south coast. By the 1930s, sugar cane cultivation had spread northwards up the coast to Umfolozi, and southwards to Port Shepstone following the establishment of the Umzimkulu mill. Subsequently, with the culture of sugar cane varieties more tolerant to cold and frost,

the sugar industry extended inland, with the erection of mills at Dalton, Noodsberg and Eston.

Over time, some mills have been forced to close or re-locate, mainly as a result of urban expansion. This is evident in eThekweni, following the gradual extension of the metropolitan boundaries to accommodate industrial and residential growth. The Illovo mill south of Durban was relocated inland to Eston, and the Mt Edgecombe mill north of Durban was closed to allow for the development of the Phoenix and Umhlanga areas. Currently, there are 8 sugar mills in operation, either at the coast or relatively close to the coast, where suitable water resources are available to support the initial annual start-up of the sugar cane milling process. These mills include Sezela and Umzimkulu, located south of Durban; Maidstone, Gledhow and Darnall, north of Durban; and Amatikulu, Felixton and Umfolozi, located north of the Thukela River.

Gross turnover was estimated to be R3.665 billion in 2011. This amount only reflects that of sugar cane farming and therefore excludes that of sugar milling, sugar cane by-products and the subsidiary support activities such as cane and sugar transport, requisite suppliers, etc. Over the ten year period from 2000-2010, there was a notable decline of nearly

Commercial afforestation and sugar cane fields located in the KZN coastal zone.



Photo: ORI

50 000 ha in the area under cultivation for sugar cane, which can be attributed to: the emergence of new residential and industrial developments south and north of the Durban metropolitan district, including additional land for King Shaka airport; land claims (south and north coast freehold tenure farms) and land reform related issues which has created uncertainty and a resultant decline in re-investment in sugar cane root stock; relatively poor trading conditions for sugar; and a series of poor rainfall seasons.

Commercial afforestation

While naturally occurring forests have been part of the KZN landscape for many centuries, forests grown for commercial purposes are a more recent phenomenon. Today, plantations are grown for specific purposes.

In 2009, the area afforested in South Africa was approximately 1 275 000 ha, of which approximately 504 000 ha was being grown in KZN. High concentrations of forest plantations are found in five KZN regions, namely northern KZN, KZN midlands, southern KZN, Zululand and Maputaland. About 70% of this area is devoted to hardwoods, eucalyptus and wattle being the main species, and the balance to the softwoods, mainly pine. Plantations occurring adjacent to, or within the KZN coastal zone are situated at Ingwavuma in Maputaland; Lower Mfolozi and Mtunzini in Zululand; and Port Shepstone and Umzinto in southern KZN. Processing facilities are located throughout the timber growing areas in KZN, with the following being located within the KZN coastal zone: Richards Bay (Mondi); Mandeni (SAPPI); KwaDukuza (SAPPI); Merebank, south of Durban (Mondi) and Umkomaas (SAPPI).

Sub tropical fruits

Contrary to popular perception, KZN's commercial banana production forms a minor proportion of South Africa's current total production. Commercial banana production is limited to the undulating, frost-free regions of the lower South Coast, north of Port Edward. Isolated banana plantations can also be found in the irrigation areas of Nkwalini Valley, west of Empangeni in Zululand. Likewise, commercial pineapple,

Sugar cane cultivation (2000 vs 2010)¹

Mill areas: KZN Coastal Zone	Area under cane 2000 (Ha)	Area under cane 2010 (Ha)	Average annual production (Million tons cane)	Average gross turnover (R m - 2011 value)
Umfolozi	20 393	20 245	1.08	361
Felixton	37 799	29 927	1.82	605
Amatikulu	51 671	40 694	1.67	555
Darnall	31 165	25 658	1.14	380
Gledhow	22 529	30 321	1.11	369
Maidstone	39 838	22 975	1.26	419
Sezela	45 004	38 778	1.83	609
Umzimkulu	29 469	26 271	1.10	367
Total	277 868	234 869	11.01	3 665

mango and litchi production is limited to relatively small fields in the frost-free coastal zones of Zululand, the north and south coasts. However, it must be noted that together with market gardens (vegetables, madumbies, herbs, etc.), pineapples, mangos, litchis and bananas are a source of valuable subsistence income for rural communities located in these KZN Coastal regions.

Macadamia nuts

In recent times, as an alternative source of farming income, some sugar cane farmers have developed Macadamia nut orchards in areas adjacent to the KZN Coastal Zone. Being a longer term investment, full-scale production and income from this agricultural activity is still to be fully realized.

It is evident that sugar cane and forestry are the dominant agricultural activities occurring in the KZN coastal zone. The two industries make a substantial annual contribution to the KZN economy, generating a combined gross annual revenue of approximately R4 671 million. This excludes the revenue generated from the sugar mills, timber processing plants and secondary support industries. Besides revenue generation, both industries are relatively labour intensive and provide employment opportunities to a large number of unskilled workers in KZN. ■