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Global cereals break 3-Billion-Tonne barrier as wheat, maize and rice drive new era of abundance

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FAOâ??s latest outlook paints a picture of record harvests, buoyant stocks, and steady trade momentum heading into 2026 Image Source: Getty Images

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In a landmark moment for global agriculture, the FAOâ??s latest forecast places world cereal production in 2025 at 3 003 million tonnesâ??the first time global output is set to exceed the three-billion-tonne threshold. The upward revision, released this month, reflects stronger-than-expected performances across wheat, coarse grains, and rice, underscoring a year in which favourable weather, robust plantings, and resilient supply chains helped agriculture overcome persistent climate and geopolitical uncertainties.

The biggest lift came from wheat. Argentina, buoyed by larger-than-anticipated plantings and likely record yields, is poised for a historic harvest, reshaping the global supply picture. Additional output upgrades for the European Union and the United States further strengthened the wheat outlook. Coarse grains also saw modest improvementsâ??primarily from higher barley estimatesâ??while the rice sector recorded a sharp upward adjustment after Indonesia confirmed continued area expansions that will support a larger-than-expected offseason crop. With improved prospects for Bangladesh and Japan, global rice production for 2025/26 is now projected at 558.8 million tonnes (milled basis), up 1.6% from last year and at an all-time high.

Countries spearheading the rice surge include Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, and Indonesia, more than offsetting anticipated declines in Madagascar, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, and the U.S.

Solid Start for 2026 Winter Wheat

Planting of the 2026 winter wheat crop is advancing steadily across the Northern Hemisphere. In the U.S., sowing remains on schedule, though only 45 per cent of the crop is rated good to excellent, down 10 percentage points from last year amid ongoing dryness. The EUâ??s planting campaign is progressing with largely favourable conditions despite localized rainfall deficits in Italy. Russia completed its winter wheat sowing by November under mostly beneficial weather, while improved soil moisture in Ukraine helped alleviate early-season concerns, supporting expectations of a largerâ??though still sub-pre-warâ??wheat area.

Across South Asia, India and Pakistan are set for expansive wheat sowings, driven by remunerative prices and strengthened policy support.

Southern Hemisphere Begins Maize Cycle with Optimism

South Americaâ??s early signals for 2026 coarse grain production point to a rebound year. Regular early-season rains in Argentina have supported strong maize establishment, while Brazil, bolstered by firm domestic and export demand, is expected to expand maize plantings above its five-year average. In South Africa, a marginal increase in maize areaâ??particularly for yellow maizeâ??is anticipated amid expectations of a favourable rainfall season.

Cereal Utilization to Hit a Fresh Peak

Global cereal utilization for 2025/26 is forecast to rise 2.1 per cent to 59.2 million tonnes above last year, driven by increases across all major cereals. Ample supplies and stable prices are expected to encourage greater use of maize, barley, and sorghum in animal feed, with feed-quality wheat also becoming an attractive alternative.

Rice consumption is projected to expand 2.4 per cent, reaching a new peak of 552.8 million tonnes, supported by comfortable availability in key producing and consuming regions.

Record Stocks Strengthen Global Food Security Buffer

World cereal stocks by the end of the 2026 seasons are now projected at a record 925.5 million tonnes, up 6.5 per cent from opening levels. China and India are expected to drive the largest increases in wheat reserves, while Brazil and the U.S. will anchor the growth in coarse grain stocks.

Revisions this month include upward adjustments to:

Wheat stocks in Argentina and the U.S.

Maize inventories in Brazil, following an improved segunda safra outlook

Rice stocks, which rose by 1.5 million tonnes due to enhanced expectations in Indonesia

The ratio of major exportersâ?? stocks to disappearance is expected to climb to 22.3 per cent, the highest since the early 1990sâ??a robust cushion against market volatility.

Global Cereal Trade Set for a Rebound

FAO projects world cereal trade in 2025/26 at 500.6 million tonnes, a 3.3 per cent rise from last season. Wheat trade is forecast to rebound from the subdued levels of 2024/25, supported by renewed import demand from Pakistan and TÃ¼rkiye and steady buying across Asia amid stable prices and abundant exportable supplies.

Coarse grain trade is also poised to expand, with Brazil emerging as a new sorghum exporter. Wheat export forecasts for Argentina have been raised further, with its record harvest likely to find buyers in neighbouring markets such as Ecuador.

Global rice trade for calendar year 2026 is estimated at 61.2 million tonnes, largely unchanged from last month but 1.4 per cent below 2025 levels, reflecting reduced import prospects across parts of Asia.