



Nigeria contains six ecological zones, ranging from a belt of mangrove swamps and tropical forests along the coast to open woodland and savanna on the low plateau which extends through much of the central part of the country, to the semi-arid plains in the north and highlands to the east. The principal food crops are yams, cassava, and maize to the south, and millet, sorghum, and cowpeas in the drier north. Cocoa, rubber, oil palm, groundnuts, and cotton are the main cash crops which are generally destined for export.

Between the arid north and the moist south lies a Guinea Savanna Zone sometimes referred to as the middle belt. This area produces staples such as yams, sorghum, millet, cassava, cowpeas, and corn, with rice an important crop in some places. The middle belt's southern edge represents the lower limits of the northern grain-dominated economy. The most significant commercial crop of the middle belt is sesame (or benniseed).

Rainfall is heaviest in the south, where the rain forests and woodlands benefit from abundant precipitation and relatively short dry seasons. Root crops are the staples in the south, including cassava, yams, taro (*cocoyams*), and sweet potatoes. The main cash crops in the south are tree crops, which in general are grown on large plantations that include cacao, oil palm, and rubber. However, almost 85 percent of Nigeria's current palm oil production is from unorganized wild groves.

The northern third of Nigeria experiences a dry season of five to seven months, and lies mostly in the Sudan and Sahel Savanna zones. Staples in the north are millet, cowpeas, and a drought-resistant variety of sorghum known as guinea corn. Sorghum is Nigeria's most widely cultivated grain, accounting for more than 45 percent of the total area. Sorghum cultivation spans from the north to the middle belt where precipitation and soil moisture levels are low. Corn is also cultivated, as well as rice in suitable lowland areas. Wheat is a *fadama* (lowland) crop, irrigated along broad valley bottoms in the north, especially in the Lake Chad basin. The north's principal commercial crops are cotton and groundnuts.