# Europe’s worst drought in over a century threatens food security and farmers’ survival



As Europe grapples with an escalating climate crisis, a devastating drought has emerged as the most pressing environmental challenge overshadowing political discussions focused on ambitious green deals and carbon tariffs. The conditions across Northwestern Europe are alarmingly dry, with the spring of 2025 yielding the lowest rainfall witnessed in over a century. Countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and the UK are confronted with wilting crops and parched soils, as the crucial development period for staple crops unfolds in an unprecedentedly parched environment. Farmers who once cultivated vibrant fields now confront the grim reality of cracked, barren land, leading to a stark financial reckoning that is sending ripple effects through entire agricultural systems.

The European Union's climate models starkly illustrate the financial toll of extreme weather on agriculture, estimating an annual loss of €28.3 billion. In this latest bout of drought, a substantial share of these losses is tied directly to the failing weather, which has become increasingly frequent due to climate change. With farmers in regions like Lower Saxony and the Flemish plains witnessing their yields diminish daily, the lived experience of agriculture paints a far grimmer picture than isolated economic statistics. As one farmer near Bremen lamented, the struggle is not about adapting to climate change but merely surviving its relentless impact.

The implications for food security are turning increasingly dire. The EU’s agricultural output, which produced approximately 234 billion tonnes of cereals in 2024, stands on the precipice of significant decline as this year's yields are expected to plummet. The interconnectedness of Europe’s food systems means that disruptions in agriculture will reverberate beyond national borders, heightening concerns about supply chains that have already been destabilised by geopolitical tensions. In the UK, the early signs of strain are manifesting in rising wholesale prices for essential crops such as potatoes and carrots, where some farmers report water reserves dwindling to dangerous levels early in the season.

While drought's impacts are often gradual and less visible than other natural disasters, the economic ramifications are profoundly damaging. The European Central Bank has underscored the vulnerability of the Eurozone economy, predicting that droughts could slash economic output by nearly 15%—a warning bolstered by recent studies indicating that key agricultural regions may become less suitable for traditional crop production. As a result, insurance claims are mounting, subsidies are being diverted, and emergency responses are under discussion, all of which merely scratch the surface of a far deeper, systemic crisis.

Long-term strategies need consideration beyond emergency measures. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which has long governed EU agricultural funding, appears less equipped than ever to address the modern challenges posed by an environment shaped by climate change. Historically focused on yield maximisation, the CAP must evolve to support farmers facing the dual pressures of escalating production demands and safeguarding environmental sustainability. A proposed shift toward a "Green CAP" underscores a growing recognition of the need for resilience and sustainability, yet farmers facing immediate drought conditions are finding that theoretical reforms fall short of practical support.

In the face of these harsh realities, numerous farmers are taking matters into their own hands, deploying adaptive techniques such as drip irrigation and the cultivation of drought-resistant crop varieties. However, this approach is not without limitations. The financial burden of implementing such innovations can be prohibitive, often out of reach for many small-scale farmers. An agronomist in the Netherlands aptly noted that while it is feasible to practise drought-tolerant farming, the idea of drought-proof agriculture is a myth.

The challenge is compounded by broader climate policies that often seem disconnected from the daily struggles of farmers. The EU, positioning itself as a leader on climate initiatives, seems to be neglecting the very sector that is most vulnerable to the shifting climate landscape. As pressure mounts, rural discontent is surfacing politically, evident in the rise of populist movements that prioritise agricultural concerns. Countries like the Netherlands and France are experiencing shifts in voter sentiment, while in the UK, the enduring effects of Brexit add another layer of complexity, particularly with muddled subsidy schemes.

The urgency for change is palpable, calling for agricultural policies that can effectively navigate the realities of climate change. In the immediate term, meteorological forecasts provide little hope, suggesting minimal rainfall in the weeks ahead, which could lead to catastrophic declines in grain yields and necessitate emergency imports. Long-term, Europe faces a crucial crossroad: the choice between a vibrant, resilient agricultural landscape supported by intelligent policies or a depopulated, corporatised farming model governed by bureaucrats with distant priorities.

For the countless farmers across Europe, the need is clear. As expressed by one weary British farmer surveying his arid fields, “We don’t need grand speeches. We need water—and policy that doesn’t dry us out further.” The current drought is not just a passing anomaly; it is a clarion call for urgent, transformative action in the face of a climate emergency that threatens the very fabric of agricultural life on the continent.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
2. Paragraph 5
3. Paragraphs 2, 3, 4
4. Paragraph 6
5. Paragraph 7
6. Paragraph 4
7. Paragraphs 5, 6, 8

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://eutoday.net/europes-silent-crop-crisis-drought/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/2b19b5f5-69c2-4d31-aac7-28b975487d4a> - The European Central Bank (ECB) has issued a stark warning about the economic risks posed by droughts, which could reduce Eurozone economic output by nearly 15%. The ECB's research, conducted with the University of Oxford's Resilient Planet Finance Lab, highlights significant vulnerabilities in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, mining, and construction. Banks in the Eurozone currently have €1.3 trillion in loans to these high-risk sectors. ECB board member Frank Elderson emphasized that water scarcity could critically impact economic value, noting that regions like Bollenstreek in the Netherlands may become unsuitable for historical crop production. The research found southern European agriculture particularly exposed, with up to 30% of output at risk, compared to only 12% in Finland. Droughts also affect hydropower, shipping, and operational capacities across industries. The ECB's warning comes amid political resistance to green policies, especially from the U.S., where recent moves aim to reduce climate risk regulations. Despite these pressures, Elderson and others argue for maintaining transparency and reporting standards to mitigate financial risks linked to environmental degradation. The broader economic impact of natural resource erosion could lead to a global contraction of up to 2.3%, according to Allianz research.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/cop/extreme-weather-costs-eu-farmers-28-billion-euros-year-eu-says-2025-05-20/> - Extreme weather driven by climate change is costing the European Union's agriculture sector an average of €28.3 billion ($31.9 billion) annually, equating to 6% of its total crop and livestock production. According to an EU-backed report by insurance broker Howden, only 20-30% of these losses are insured, leaving most farmers without adequate financial protection. EU Agriculture Commissioner Christophe Hansen called on member states to utilize farming subsidies to address climate risks more effectively. The report warns that without stronger climate action, average crop losses could rise by up to 66% by 2050, with droughts currently responsible for over half of the damages. Southern European countries like Spain and Italy are particularly vulnerable, with potential annual losses reaching €20 billion during catastrophic years. Amid growing pressure on both environmental sustainability and farmer livelihoods, the European Commission recently proposed easing some environmental conditions tied to subsidies and accelerating emergency support for disaster-hit farmers. The European Investment Bank plans to use the analysis to guide future agricultural support, including increased funding for water-related projects and irrigation infrastructure.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/sustainable-switch-climate-focus-eu-water-saving-funds-melting-glaciers-2025-05-19/> - The May 19, 2025 edition of the Sustainable Switch Climate Focus newsletter highlights key climate-related developments across Europe and beyond. A primary focus is the European Union’s proposal to provide new subsidies under the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to support farmers in using water more efficiently. The plan aims to address growing pressure on water resources due to industrial demand and climate change. These subsidies could fund drought-resistant crops and precision irrigation tools. The European Investment Bank will also boost water sector investments, such as ecosystem restoration. The EU’s CAP, worth €387 billion, is due for renegotiation later this year. Other topics covered include Argentina's melting glaciers and growing tensions between India and Pakistan over the Indus River. In the UK, Thames Water continues to face financial instability, with 98.78% of its creditors backing a debt restructuring plan, and the company recently partnered with KKR to secure additional equity. Additionally, a pilot project off England’s south coast is testing ocean-based carbon dioxide removal from seawater.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/8e69c305-8f22-4052-817d-5397f107d8c8> - England and Wales are experiencing their driest year since 1997, with only 225mm of rainfall recorded by mid-May 2025—29% below average—making it the seventh-driest year since 1931. The Environment Agency's latest report highlights significantly reduced river flows, particularly in northern regions, where six sites logged their lowest-ever April flows. The agency has issued a medium drought risk warning and anticipates potential water usage restrictions, such as hosepipe bans. Reservoirs remain around 84% full, but levels are notably low in the North East and North West, which have seen their driest start to a year since 1929. Farmers are increasingly concerned, with early irrigation underway in some areas despite good groundwater reserves. Water companies like Yorkshire Water, United Utilities, and Severn Trent are preparing for possible shortages. Thames Water's CEO affirmed that supply would continue but cautioned that usage restrictions may be necessary depending on future rainfall. The report links recent dry conditions to climate change, predicting more frequent summer droughts in the coming decades.
6. <https://time.com/6152615/ipcc-report-climate-change-agriculture/> - The latest report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasizes the severe and widespread impacts of global warming on humanity and the planet. The findings indicate that climate change is already causing irreversible damage, with nearly half of the global population living in highly vulnerable areas. The most significant effects are expected to hit agricultural systems, leading to food and water scarcities that could incite conflicts, migration, and increased poverty. Small-scale farmers, responsible for a third of the world's food, are particularly at risk, and significant agricultural production losses are predicted globally. This situation will exacerbate grocery bills, including in wealthy countries, due to the interconnectedness of global food systems. There is an urgent need for rapid fossil fuel emission reductions to limit warming and prevent the worst outcomes. Although adaptation is possible through innovation and changes in farming practices, the window for action is narrow, with current trends pointing towards worsening conditions.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/eu-plans-new-subsidies-farmers-save-water-draft-shows-2025-05-15/> - The European Commission is drafting plans to offer new subsidies to farmers under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to promote better water management and reduce waste. The CAP, valued at €387 billion for 2021-2027, constitutes nearly a third of the EU's overall budget. As EU countries prepare for negotiations on the post-2027 budget, the Commission’s proposal suggests "transition packages" that provide guidance and financial support for farmers adopting environmentally sustainable practices. These funds could assist with the adoption of drought-resistant crops and precision irrigation systems to address mounting pressure on water resources due to climate change and industrial use. European agriculture has been significantly impacted by increasing drought and flooding, which have hurt crop yields. However, the EU has recently eased some environmental regulations in response to farmer protests over regulatory burdens. The draft also mentions plans for the European Investment Bank to increase investments in water-related projects, including wetland restoration to mitigate flooding. Details on funding amounts are still under discussion, with the full strategy expected to be published in June.