# Empty supermarket shelves highlight growing impact of climate change on UK farming



Empty shelves at supermarkets in Kendal, Cumbria, have prompted concerns over the potential impact of extreme weather and new pest invasions on UK agriculture. Shoppers may soon face both empty aisles and rising prices as these climatic challenges persist. According to the Met Office, April 2023 was recorded as the sunniest and third-warmest on record, while it was also notably dry. Certain regions, particularly in the Midlands and Northern England, received less than 20% of their usual rainfall, and many areas in the South experienced less than half.

Jenna Hegarty, head of policy at the Nature Friendly Farming Network, highlighted the severity of the situation, stating, "This very dry spell follows England and Wales's driest March for 60 years and is a stark reminder that climate change is biting now." She noted that farmers are increasingly confronted with erratic weather conditions, including extreme heat, floods, and evolving threats from pests and diseases. These factors jeopardise consistent harvests, complicating long-term agricultural planning.

The UK predominantly relies on imported fruits and vegetables, many of which come from regions heavily impacted by climate change. To mitigate the risks of food shortages and inflated prices for consumers, Hegarty stressed the need to enhance UK horticulture, advocating for practices that align with environmental sustainability and farm resilience.

Mark Betson, a water resources specialist at the National Farmers Union, echoed Hegarty's concerns, elaborating on the varying conditions across farming sectors. "As the warm and sunny weather continues, the situation on the ground remains hugely variable," he stated. Betson explained that the ongoing dry conditions have led some farmers to irrigate crops earlier than usual, although reservoirs remain adequately stocked due to ample rainfall in the previous autumn and winter.

Farmer Ben Aveling reflected on the dependency of produce quality on rainfall, asserting, "At the moment the quality of the produce will be getting a boost. With good grass you get excellent quality dairy and meats." He mentioned the timely availability of spring lambs and noted that vegetables like asparagus are thriving despite the dry conditions.

Aveling expressed cautious optimism, stating, "If this heat continues and the heavens offer us some decent rain, we stand a chance of having high crop yields." He indicated that favourable weather could lead to more substantial yields and greater availability of UK-grown produce in supermarkets. However, he also warned that lack of rainfall could induce stress on crops, leading to diminished yields.

The situation underscores a complex web of challenges facing UK farmers, highlighting the interplay between climate change and food production, and its potential ramifications for consumers.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/learn-about/weather/uk-weather/uk-climate> - This URL provides information about the historical climate data, supporting the claims of April 2023 being the sunniest and third-warmest on record.
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/apr/30/drought-uk-farmers-east-yorkshire> - This article discusses the dry conditions faced by various UK regions, corroborating claims of extreme weather and its impact on agriculture.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-65201124> - This BBC article highlights how climate change affects UK agriculture, encompassing the threats from pests and erratic weather patterns mentioned in the source.
4. <https://www.nfuonline.com/news/latest-news/lack-of-rainfall-and-the-impact-on-farmland/> - This article features insights from NFU representatives, echoing concerns over drought conditions and the impacts on irrigation practices, validating claims made by Mark Betson.
5. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=774> - The Royal Horticultural Society's guidance on sustainable horticulture supports calls for enhancing UK horticulture to cope with climate challenges as mentioned by Jenna Hegarty.
6. <https://www.nutritionaloutlook.com/view/spring-crops-and-weather-impacts-produce-quality> - This article discusses the relationship between weather conditions and produce quality, aligning with Ben Aveling's statements about the quality of crops and dependence on rainfall.
7. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/2051168/shoppers-face-extreme-weather-supermarkets> - Please view link - unable to able to access data