# Scotland’s driest spring in over a century threatens whisky, dairy and wildlife



Farmers across Scotland are grappling with what they describe as an ‘existential’ threat to agriculture, facing the driest spring in over a century. The unrelenting sunshine, which has provided a welcome respite from the typical Scottish weather, is transforming into a crisis for those reliant on crop yields. This situation spells potential disaster for core industries such as whisky production and dairy farming, as the dry conditions threaten to compromise both quality and volume.

According to Andrew Connon, President of NFU Scotland, the current weather patterns are unusual and alarming. “Scotland is facing one of its driest springs in recent memory,” he stated. Farmers are anxious as they prepare for a summer that, without immediate and substantial rainfall, could severely impact food production. He highlighted that the persistent dry spells, typically expected in the height of summer, have arrived early, leaving soils “bone dry.” The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Sepa) corroborated these worries, revealing that from January to April, the country has only received 59 per cent of its long-term average rainfall, signalling a significant water scarcity.

The acuteness of this dry spell has forced arable farmers to take drastic measures. Some have resorted to using irrigation tools typically reserved for potatoes to try to save failing crops of spring barley. Others have made the difficult decision to re-sow their crops altogether, as initial attempts have yielded poor germination rates. The pressing need for water is compounded by forecasts indicating that no significant rainfall is expected in the near future, which raises fears about diminished quality and yields at harvest time.

The Met Office has noted that Scotland's spring weather has been unusually dry, with rainfall for May measuring just 3.3mm so far, starkly contrasting with the expected average of 19mm. This trend has led to warnings from industry leaders that if the situation persists, the ramifications will extend beyond the current season. For livestock farmers, the dry conditions could lead to food shortages later in the year, compelling them to procure costly feeds or even diminish their herds to manage their resources.

In upland areas, the lack of moisture can create further ecological challenges, as Jamie Blackett, a farmer and activist, elaborated. Without adequate rainfall, there is a risk that vital food sources for wildlife, such as insects, will dwindle, affecting populations of grouse and thereby threatening local economies reliant on shooting season revenues.

Concerningly, the government has faced criticism for its inadequate investment in sustainable water storage solutions to combat such crises. Connon added, “We’ve been calling on the Scottish Government to support farmers with capital funding for water storage and efficiency.” This includes essential infrastructure like boreholes and irrigation systems that could alleviate the current stress on farmers.

The urgency for intervention has been echoed throughout the agricultural sector. The Environment Agency has called for immediate action to reduce water loss from existing resources, highlighting the critical need for measures to support farmers amidst dwindling water supplies. As Scotland's farmers look ahead, the current climatic conditions pose a significant threat to not only immediate crop and livestock health but to the broader agricultural economy, necessitating an urgent response from both local government and industry stakeholders.

In conclusion, as the region braces for an uncertain summer, Scotland's farmers stand at a crossroads. Whether they will receive the support and resources needed to adapt to these devastating conditions remains to be seen, but the stakes are undeniably high.

### Reference Map

1. Core focus on the current state of Scottish farming and drought conditions.
2. Measures by arable farmers in central Scotland to save crops.
3. Water scarcity alerts issued across various regions.
4. General increase in pressure regarding water supplies and irrigation needs.
5. NFU Scotland’s communication with government regarding farmer support.
6. Overview of immediate agricultural consequences from the drought.
7. UK weather patterns and comparisons to previous years.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14725061/Its-like-trying-plant-concrete-farmers-fear-driest-spring-100-years-spells-disaster.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/business/farming/1236615/undefined-headline-2769/> - Arable farmers in central Scotland are taking unprecedented steps to save their crops after weeks of drought have left light soils parched. With no significant rain forecast for another 10 days, some growers have resorted to using potato irrigation equipment to drench fields of spring barley which are failing to germinate. Other growers have been forced to re-sow their barley crops and start from scratch. Now fears are growing that if the current situation continues it will result in compromised quality and yields at harvest time.
3. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/23562497.water-scarcity-alert-issued-dry-spring-scotland/> - Parts of Scotland are in a state of water scarcity while southern England has seen above-average rainfall, according to Met Office analysis. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Sepa) has announced a water scarcity alert for many parts of the northern Highlands and the Outer Hebrides, as well as parts of the Scottish Borders. A moderate scarcity alert is in place around Loch Maree – one step away from the most serious category – with almost every other Scottish region in an early warning state.
4. <https://www.farminguk.com/news/farm-pressure-as-drought-threat-grows-after-driest-spring-since-1961_66528.html> - Farmers are under mounting pressure as the Environment Agency (EA) warns of a growing threat to water supplies following the driest start to spring since 1961. The regulator has called for urgent action to reduce leakage and help the agricultural sector, which is already resorting to early irrigation amid critically low reservoir levels. At a meeting of the National Drought Group, the EA stressed the need for water firms to act swiftly to support farmers and manage the rising risk of drought, particularly if the dry conditions continue.
5. <https://www.agriland.co.uk/farming-news/nfu-scotland-lays-out-terms-for-gov-after-poor-spring/> - NFU Scotland has written to the Scottish government to enable farmers, crofters, and growers to continue to produce high-quality food against the backdrop of one of the 'most challenging springs' on record. Agricultural businesses across Scotland have suffered due to sustained cold and wet weather, according to NFU Scotland. The letter pointed out that lambing and calving have been extremely challenging for farmers, and the losses, late turnout, and additional feeding requirements have resulted in significant financial and emotional pressures for farmers.
6. <https://www.fas.scot/article/coping-spring-drought/> - Many parts of Scotland have had an extremely dry spring. Some of the consequences of this are reduced grass growth and potentially smaller acres of grass conserved with lower yields, and poor and uneven establishment of spring-sown crops. An immediate reaction to this is the increased price for malting barley in expectation of a shortage of malting quality from this year’s harvest. At present, the outlook for livestock producers is poorer grazing performance for growing stock with fewer finishing off grass and lighter animals at the start of next winter.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3gljqljywpo> - According to the Met Office, the UK provisionally recorded 445.8mm of rainfall this winter, which is 129% of the 1991-2020 average and the eighth wettest winter. Its rainfall map shows that much of north-east Scotland was particularly wet, with Moray, Aberdeenshire, and Angus all hit with rainfall well above the seasonal average. Ms. Wordie, who is based near Huntly, said: 'It's just been constant. We're now into April and we're still getting it – it's still cold, it's still wet.'