# UK farmers face unprecedented drought amid driest spring in over a century



As UK farmers face the harsh reality of the driest spring in over a century, many are anxiously awaiting rainfall to alleviate the dire conditions impacting their crops. This year, Britain has experienced an alarming deficiency in precipitation, with only 80.6 millimetres of rain recorded from March to May, significantly below the historical low of 100.7 millimetres set in 1852. This extraordinary dry spell is leaving fields parched and fuelling concerns over food security and rising prices in supermarkets.

At a 400-hectare farm in the Peterborough area, Luke Abblitt is one of the many farmers struggling with the effects of this drought. He gazes across his fields, where young sugar beets and potatoes appear stunted and vulnerable due to the lack of water. “I’m hoping that we’re going to get some rain; if not, then I’ll have to somehow magically do something,” Abblitt remarked, illuminating the uncertainty that permeates the agricultural community.

The situation is exacerbated by a pattern of increasingly erratic weather, marked by extremes in rainfall. While winter brings a deluge, spring often yields scant rainfall, as observed this year. Experts like Liz Bentley, chief executive of the Royal Meteorological Society, have warned that such shifts towards more pronounced droughts are likely to become frequent due to climate change. The historical frequency of droughts has shifted from every 16 years to one every five, with predictions suggesting that this could worsen to one in every three years in the coming decades.

East Anglia has been particularly hard hit, with regions receiving only 21% of the typical rainfall for this time of year. Farmers such as Chris Bateman from the National Federation of Young Farmers have raised alarms regarding maize crops suffering catastrophic failures due to the lack of moisture. The pressing need for rain is echoed across various farm types, with revelations that potatoes demand significant water to flourish, essential for maintaining quality for their primary market—fish and chip shops.

The ramifications of continued dry conditions are not limited to individual farmers; they threaten the broader agricultural economy. Recent reports reveal a 19% drop in the farming income for England, attributed not only to drought but also severe flooding earlier in the year, creating a volatile balance that farmers must navigate. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has underscored the necessity for farmers to adapt; investment in water storage and irrigation systems is now critical.

The Environment Agency is closely monitoring reservoir levels, which have fallen to "exceptionally low" states, leading to urgent considerations regarding water management. Companies are mobilising resources to mitigate the risk of drought-stricken crops. Historically, England has grappled with water scarcity issues, yet the current scenario is markedly severe, underscoring the increasing vulnerability of UK agriculture.

Further complicating the situation is the call for improved irrigation strategies. Abblitt applied for a licence to install an irrigation system two years ago but has yet to receive approval. This prolonged wait highlights the administrative challenges that hinder farmers' ability to safeguard their crops against the increasingly erratic weather patterns. As the farming community collectively prays for rain, the necessity for systemic changes in water management and agricultural practices has never been more pronounced.

Amidst all this, the stark contrast of weather conditions across the nation raises questions: Can the UK's farming sector adapt effectively to the demands of an unpredictably changing climate? With increasing pressure on both crops and water resources, the stakes have risen, marking a pivotal moment for farmers and policymakers alike as they confront the realities of climate change head-on.

### Reference Map

1. Articles 1, 2, 4, 6, 7

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/uk-farmers-pray-rain-amid-015951300.html?guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9uZXdzLmdvb2dsZS5jb20v&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAEUspcvsjJ_QZJl8mDnThvd_lnpS_VkbUde2D5Sy1qVZcNJ0kzD2MBWEMW6KGHTdDH6brmIGXvdSCVVSM6SkFob9dV2Rz7REwtLC-AXF1BmT9lGLMlM-b-IgutP2BQKXgz7CuFqoZe_PtjO0LlZmM8bbmp_P8mN3KTMDid2pCrsu&_guc_consent_skip=1747709613> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-13617207> - In 2023, parts of the UK experienced the driest and warmest spring in over a century, with England and Wales receiving only 45% of the average rainfall for March, April, and May. East Anglia recorded just 21% of its long-term average rainfall, marking the driest spring in 101 years. This severe drought led to crop failures and concerns over rising food prices. Farmers, such as Chris Bateman from the National Federation of Young Farmers, expressed serious concerns about the impact on maize crops and the need for immediate rainfall to prevent significant losses.
3. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/news-and-media/media-centre/weather-and-climate-news/2023/february-and-winter-stats> - February 2023 was England's driest in 30 years, with only 15.3mm of rainfall, marking the eighth driest February since 1836. The south and east regions, including Bedfordshire, Greater London, and Essex, experienced particularly low rainfall, with Essex receiving just 8% of its average. This prolonged dry period raised concerns about water scarcity and its impact on agriculture, prompting the Met Office to issue water scarcity alerts and emphasize the need for water conservation measures.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/12/floods-fuelled-19-drop-in-income-from-farming-in-england-in-2023> - In 2023, England's farming income dropped by 19% to £4.5 billion, influenced by severe flooding and climate change. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) reported a £1.5 billion decrease in crop outputs, attributed to both market price crashes and poor yields. The Met Office recorded 1,695.9mm of rainfall from October 2022 to March 2024, the highest in any 18-month period since 1836. Experts warn that without adaptation to climate change, the future of UK farming and food security is at risk.
5. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/blog/2025/why-has-spring-been-so-warm-and-dry-so-far-this-year> - Spring 2025 in the UK has been notably dry due to persistent high-pressure systems, leading to significantly less rainfall than usual. The jet stream's meandering path has allowed these high-pressure areas to remain over the UK, blocking typical weather fronts. This unusual pattern has resulted in a dry spring, raising concerns about water scarcity and its potential impact on agriculture and water resources.
6. <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/blog/2023/relative-lack-of-spring-rainfall-triggers-water-scarcity-alert> - In 2023, the UK experienced below-average rainfall during spring, with only 83% of the average rainfall recorded over the winter period. This shortfall, combined with the driest February in 30 years, led to water scarcity alerts. The Met Office highlighted the need for water conservation measures and emphasized the importance of efficient water management to mitigate the effects of the dry conditions on agriculture and water resources.
7. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/englands-driest-start-to-spring-for-69-years-raises-risk-of-summer-drought-Y6E7NURD4VNOPCFRA25JK6Y6BQ/> - England's 2023 spring began with the driest conditions in 69 years, raising concerns about potential summer droughts. Reservoir levels were notably low across the north-east and north-west, prompting early irrigation by farmers. The Environment Agency monitored the situation closely, working with farmers on irrigation plans and advising the public on water conservation. The dry conditions underscored the need for effective water management strategies to address the challenges posed by changing weather patterns.