



By: TA | AP Insight

How much will European agriculture lose as a result of this year's drought?



A cloud of dust billows behind Maarten Janse's tractor as he spreads a mixture of compost, straw and manure over a field to nourish the parched soil.

Janse's farm on the fertile land of the Netherlands' southwestern Zeeland Province is drying out despite his efforts to make it more drought resistant as accelerated human-caused global warming and a supersized **El Nino** batter fields across Europe.

The drought that is roasting **much of Europe** this summer is taking a heavy toll on crops across the continent, from potatoes in the Netherlands to corn in Bosnia and **grapes in Italy**.

Even when farmers try to adapt, the extreme weather is hitting their crops and water supplies.

Triodos, a Dutch bank that has a focus on sustainability, published an analysis this week that estimated the heatwaves and drought could reduce gross domestic product across the European Union by 1% for 2026 or around 180 billion euros (\$208 billion).

Farmers are among the hardest hit, with their crops set to be badly affected by soaring temperatures and lack of water.

In large parts of the Netherlands, farmers are no longer allowed to use water from streams and drainage channels to irrigate fields and orchards.

Just add water? Dutch crops suffer from the drought

Another farmer in Zeeland, Hendrik Jan ten Cate, looks at a field full of withered potato plants that are almost all ready for harvest — a month early and with a significantly reduced crop.

His potatoes are used to make French fries for companies including McDonald's, but they're likely going to be too small this year.

"People want long fries," he says as he holds one of the potatoes. "That's going to be tough this year."

Ten Cate is one of the lucky farmers because he is allowed to irrigate his crops. But, even so, he estimates his harvest this year will be down by about one-third compared to average years.

It's not just the drought that is the problem. It is also the sun, the dry air and especially the hot days we have had this year - Ten Cate

"It's not just the drought that is the problem," he says. "It is also the sun, the dry air and especially the hot days we have had this year. The potatoes just can't handle that combination very well."

Bosnian agriculture, a key driver of the economy, is suffering

In Bosnia, where agriculture contributes roughly 5% of annual GDP and 10% of all employment, grain farmer Slavisa Lukic stood in one of his corn fields as stalks blew limply in the breeze.

His crops have been hit by repeated heat waves and drought conditions. He said this year's corn yield would be very poor, if he manages to harvest one at all.

Lukic remembers when he grew 6 to 7 tons per hectare on his farm. He expects this year's corn yield will be around 1.5 to 2 tons per hectare.

Pointing to the drought-stricken land in northeastern Bosnia, Lukic said clover fields that once grew abundantly have all but disappeared. "Now they literally do not exist," he said. "Nothing."

Czech brewers fear bad hop harvest

The drought is even hitting one of the Czech Republic's most famous products: beer.

Plzeňský Prazdroj, the country's largest beer producer, expects to incur losses this year due to a stunted hops yield.

There's no choice but to simply accept the fact that one year will be great and the next won't be - Jakub Zaoral

Jakub Zaoral, the brewer's sustainability manager, said that changes in rainfall patterns – characterized by long periods of dryness with occasional heavy storms – mean that when rain does fall, it runs off the dry soil.

That results in inconsistent yields and increasingly low groundwater levels.

"There's no choice but to simply accept the fact that one year will be great and the next won't be," he said. "If it were to happen three times in a row, that could very well become an existential problem for hop growers."

Drought takes a toll across the Danube region

In Romania, some heat and drought-resistant crops like sunflowers have been less affected by the extreme conditions and yields have been plentiful.

But the drought is still hitting home with record-low water levels on the Danube River disrupting grain transport, causing chronically congested terminals and an increasing pileup of crops with nowhere to go.



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"In a short time, maximum 10 days, we will enter full blast in sunflower harvest, to be followed by corn," Cezar Gheorghe, founder of grain consultancy firm Agricolumn, told The Associated Press. "Already farmers are in panic mode. They can't find a place to store the corn and sunflower seeds."

Cattle grazing plains in Hungary are turning to dust. No rain has fallen on Sándor Molnár's dairy farm since late May and he is having to buy expensive feed for his 130 cows.

"We're trying to hang in there and hope for the best, hoping next year will be better," he added. "To be honest, we've been saying that for a few years now, but maybe this time it will be."

Huge UK farm that invested in irrigation is feeling the heat

Elveden Estate, with more than 10,000 acres of farmland on the Suffolk-Norfolk border in eastern England, has built a reservoir that can hold enough water to fill about 200 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Less than a year after opening, it's almost dry. Another reservoir is at about 20% capacity.

But the farm's water policy is paying off.

We've been in a very strong position to continue to irrigate our crops through this growing season - Andrew Blenkiron

"The fact that we've invested significantly in reservoir storage and the infrastructure associated with pumping water has meant that we've been in a very strong position to continue to irrigate our crops through this growing season," the farm's managing director, Andrew Blenkiron, said.

But every drop counts.

"We're very concerned that we haven't got enough water to see us through this season," Blenkiron said. "We've got probably, if this weather stays as it is, six weeks of watering left to do."

Diversify and feed the soil

Janse uses **no-till farming** on his fields — not plowing the soil, planting crops to cover the ground year-round and adding organic matter — to help cope with the whims of the weather as climate change triggers more extremes.

He has also diversified by running a popular campsite on his farm near the picturesque town of Veere.

As he tends to his fields, guests walk by toward a lake where yachts and a river cruise ship sail past.

And as dry weather causes an increase in soil salinity in fields, Janse grows samphire, also known as sea asparagus, on a small patch of land.

It's a crop that can thrive in salty conditions. But with no rainfall, even that is struggling this year.

"Samphire needs fresh water, and if there is only saltwater it doesn't grow either," he said.