

Drought brings big worries for farmers across northern Europe

“I have never seen this type of hot and dry weather, and I’ve been farming over 30 years,” one farmer in Finland said.



A grain field in Germany where farmers have been affected by this summer’s drought. picture alliance / picture alliance via Getty Image

LONDON — Brown is the color of summer in northern Europe this year.

Fields that are usually covered in lush green grass have now turned to dust, trees are shedding their leaves and animals eating dry hay or grain instead of grazing in pastures.

Farmers in around a dozen countries — from Ireland to the Baltics — are grappling with a once-in-a-generation drought. The unrelenting heat wave has devastated crops, with more than half of the harvest expected to be lost in some areas.



Potato plants suffer in the heat in a field in Germany. picture alliance / picture alliance via Getty Image

“I have never seen this type of hot and dry weather, and I’ve been farming over 30 years,” Max Schulman told NBC News from his farm about 35 miles outside of Helsinki, where he grows beans, oats, wheat and oilseeds.

Schulman says his farm has received just 3 inches of rain since the end of April, compared with 10 to 14 inches most years.

In many areas, the scale of the damage is not yet known as harvests have not been completed.

However, some of the crops hit by the drought include:

- Onions and carrots. U.K. growers expect losses of 30 to 40 percent for carrots and at least 25 percent for onions.
- Potatoes. At least 25 percent of Germany’s harvest is likely to be affected.
- Corn. Around 60 percent has been destroyed in the Netherlands.
- Cereals like wheat, barley and oats. At least 35 percent of the harvest has been lost in Sweden.

The drought has hit Denmark particularly hard, with the spring harvest of grains and vegetables down 40 to 50 percent, according to Troels Toft, an official with the Danish Agriculture and Food Council. He estimates that the losses will cost the country's farming industry around \$944 million.



These satellite images show how this year's heat wave has taken its toll on vegetation in northern Germany, Denmark and Sweden. The first image shows how green the vegetation looked on June 30 and how it appeared dry and brown around two weeks later. ESA

"We haven't seen anything like this for the last 150 years or so," he said. "When you drive around Denmark it's not the country we are used to seeing. Some farmers will go bankrupt, that's for sure. If you had problems before the drought then this can be the push over the edge."

Farming associations across northern Europe are turning to their governments and to the E.U. for support, including in Germany, an economic powerhouse where losses are expected to top \$1.1 billion.



Dried-out sunflowers in a field near Breydin, Germany, on Monday. Fabrizio Bensch / Reuters file

The loss of crops has consequences for people and animals. In addition to likely price rises for staples like wheat, vegetables will be smaller than usual this year.

Breweries and whiskey distilleries that depend on barley and other grains are watching the harvest carefully to see how the situation will affect supply and pricing.

Meanwhile, farmers who rely on grass to feed their cows, pigs and sheep have already had to break into their winter food rations. With not enough grass for their livestock, some have started to sell animals from their herds.

“We’ve had very bad luck recently — last year was rainy and we missed the last cut of grass because it was too wet to harvest. And now we’re missing another cut,” said Mikkel Juhl Nielsen, an organic beef and milk farmer in Denmark. He plans to reduce his herd from 180 cows to 150 before the winter.

The drought has caused more than just crop failures — wildfires in Sweden burned tens of thousands of acres of land.

The extreme weather comes as no surprise to scientists or to farmers, who say they are on the front line of climate change.

In Britain, farmers are facing more than just the weather.

Since the 2016 Brexit vote to leave the European Union, there's been a sharp decrease in the availability of workers from other parts of the 28-country bloc in the U.K.

That has meant farmers have been forced to leave good fruit rotting on the vine because no one is available to pick it, while leaving other fields fallow to avoid crops going to waste.

"This unprecedented spell of weather really should be a wake-up call for us all. It's a timely reminder that we shouldn't take food production for granted," said Minette Batters, president of the National Farmers Union in the U.K.

But Max Schulman and other farmers say even help from the government won't be enough to make up for this summer's weather-related losses.

"To a single farmer this type of year is catastrophic," Schulman said. "We are a minority, but we play a big role in the economy and in your daily life."

Source: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/drought-brings-big-worries-farmers-across-northern-europe-n896096>

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