

Mexican farmers despair over record drought

December 13 2011



A farmer works in a dried corn field around the village of Felipe Carrillo Puerto in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo. Dust blows across once fertile fields in north Mexico, where the worst drought in 70 years has left thousands of cattle dead and destroyed more than two million acres (almost one million hectares) of crops.

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"It practically hasn't rained this year," said Ernesto Ruiz, a farmer in Satevo, in the border state of Chihuahua.

"It's sad to see the land like this," Ruiz added, observing the remains of his corn and [sorghum](#) fields.

Dry conditions have affected 1.7 million head of cattle, including 50,000 that have died, according to the Agriculture Ministry.

Northern states are suffering the most and seeing record levels of drought, including Chihuahua, neighboring Durango and the northwestern Baja California peninsula, along with their neighbors in the southwest United States.

Mexican meteorological services say the nine worst-affected states represent almost half the country. Southern areas have meanwhile recorded some of their wettest periods on record this year.

The start of winter brought [cold temperatures](#) but no sign of rain in many northern areas.

Rainfall could be up to 80 percent less than usual in some areas through the winter, according to the Environment Ministry.



A peasant stands in the middle of a dried corn field around the village of Felipe Carrillo Puerto in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo. Dust blows across once fertile fields in north Mexico, where the worst drought in 70 years has left thousands of cattle dead and destroyed more than two million acres (almost one million hectares) of crops.

The dire predictions provoked dismay, including among farmers who rely on sophisticated [irrigation systems](#), such as Ever Mendoza.

Mendoza said that a river which once reached the same width as his fields was now reduced to little more than a trickle.

His [water reserves](#) were nearly empty and his few remaining crops were low.

"Normally it should grow this high every 22 days after sowing," Mendoza demonstrated with his hand. After a month and a half, the crops were still far below target, he said.

[Rural development](#) officer Jose Granillo Vazquez estimated that 70-80,000 families in Chihuahua could be seriously affected by the drought.

"The smaller the farmer, the fewer the resources they will have to confront a risk like this," Vazquez said.

The government is offering subsidies to small-scale farmers to help them survive, as well as sending water to remote villages.

Authorities say they have already paid out more than two billion pesos (around 160 million dollars) in insurance and direct aid.

Many have yet to receive help.

In the northern state of Durango, the drought has also affected drinking water supplies in around 200 communities and authorities are urging the federal government to declare a state of emergency.

Many farmers fear they will have to wait until the start of the rainy

season next June for rain -- if it comes.

"If there's no water, nothing is going to grow," Mendoza said.

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Citation: Mexican farmers despair over record drought (2011, December 13) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-12-mexican-farmers-despair-drought.html>

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