

European farms, wildlife parched in post-heatwave drought

July 16 2019, by Charlotte Mason



Unusually high temperatures in Spain are expected to continue into August and September

Farmers, private households and wildlife around Europe are suffering in a drought following last month's record temperatures that scorched much

of the continent.

The record June heatwave which smashed all-time temperature records in France may have passed—for now—but there has also been little rainfall in recent weeks to alleviate [water shortages](#).

In Spain, grape and tomato farmers who depend on water from winter rains that are stored in the soil have seen their crops wilt.

In Germany, low water levels forced authorities to cut back on boat travel on the Elbe and Oder rivers.

And across the border in France, water restrictions around the country saw families cut back as supplies dwindled.

While water shortages are nothing new in countries like France, the ferocious heatwave that hit Europe last month has aggravated the problem.

At least 10 countries, from the Netherlands to Slovakia, sweltered in the hottest June since records began, Meteo France weather forecaster Etienne Kapikian said on Twitter.

In France, 61 of the country's 96 mainland regions, or "departments", saw water restrictions on Tuesday, according to the state-run [water restrictions](#) website Propluvia.

People in some areas were told not to wash their car or water plants, with restrictions elsewhere calling for a total cutback on all but essential use, such as drinking water.



Water restrictions hit farmers hard, with "crisis" alerts in some areas of France

The measure particularly hit French farmers, with a string of "crisis" alerts banning water for agricultural purposes.

In the central Cher department, where authorities have issued such alerts in several areas, farmers were trying to adapt to extreme temperatures.

"We try our best to manage (our [water](#) consumption) early in spring and change the kind of crops we grow," Arnaud Lespagnol, president of the FDSEA farmers union in Cher, told French TV channel BFM.

But "making small changes to the way we work won't be enough. We need to be asking the right questions on a regional scale".

Trees dying of thirst

Spanish farmers suffered too, with the country roasting in the third driest year this century.

Agriculture Minister Luis Planas said the government was "aware" of the "worrying situation" facing livestock and crop farmers.

He said the government would "adopt the necessary measures depending on how the situation evolves".

Unusually [high temperatures](#) in Spain are expected to continue into August and September, national weather agency AEMET said.



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In the Baltic state of Lithuania, the government declared an emergency earlier this month as a severe drought threatened to slash this year's harvest by up to half.

Environment Minister Kestutis Mazeika told AFP that "nobody has any doubt" that [climate change](#) is behind the prolonged and more intense dry spells and heatwaves in recent years.

The drought has also taken its toll on wildlife.

In the eastern French region of Vosges, famed for its mountains and lakes, foresters have been forced to cut down wilting fir trees which are dying of thirst.

Around Europe, parasites attracted to dying trees have infested between 60 to 80 million of them.

"We believe we're seeing the start of this phenomenon rather than the middle," said Cedric Ficht, a local chief of the French national forests office (ONF).

Several governments have blamed global warming for the [extreme temperatures](#).

In March, Spain's weather agency AEMET said around two-thirds of the country's population, around 32 million people, are having to deal with longer summers and higher temperatures as a result of climate change.

A single degree of warming since the industrial revolution has already

boosted the frequency and intensity of heat waves and droughts.

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