

Drought slashes Australian crop output to record low

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Australia's hottest and driest year on record has slashed crop production, with summer output expected to fall to the lowest levels on record, according to official projections released Tuesday.

The country's [agriculture department](#) said it expects production of crops like sorghum, cotton and rice to fall 66 percent—the lowest levels since records began in 1980-81.

"It is the lowest summer [crop production](#) in this period by a large margin," Peter Collins, a senior economist with the department's statistical body ABARES told AFP.

Early February downpours are likely to have come too late to help farmers.

Swathes of Australian farmland have suffered three or more years of drought. But 2019 saw rainfall below the previous record low set in 1902 and [average temperatures](#) 0.2 degrees Celsius (0.4 degrees Fahrenheit) above the previous warmest year in 2013.

The fall in the summer forecast follows a drop of winter [crops](#)—which includes wheat, a major cash crop—by an estimated five percent.

Australia is one of the world's leading agricultural producers, with the sector making up around three percent of total GDP.

The climate-change-fuelled drought also exacerbated a bushfire season that ripped through more than 10 million hectares (25 million acres) of tinder-dry landscape in Australia's south and east, killing 33 people.

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