

# Severe droughts dry up dreams of Turkish farmers

October 5 2021, by Raziye Akkoc

---



Severe droughts in Turkey have forced farmers to fill tanks with water.

Turkish farmer Hava Keles stares inconsolably at withered vines of rotting tomatoes in a field that has been devastated by a series of droughts blamed on climate change.

"My tomatoes, my beans, my peppers are ruined. My watermelons didn't even grow. The cucumbers I planted have shrivelled up on the branches," lamented Keles, 58, standing in an arid Anatolian plot in Akkuzulu, north of Ankara.

Keles is among thousands of farmers across Turkey whose livelihoods have been ravaged as little rain has fallen to nourish their crops for the past two years.

Some experts accuse President Recep Tayyip Erdogan—whose popularity has relied on prosperity driven by fast urban development—of failing to do enough to address pressing environmental issues in the country.

But Erdogan has promised Turkey would ratify the 2015 Paris Agreement in October before a pivotal UN climate summit next month in Glasgow. Turkey signed the deal in 2016.

Environmental issues had never topped the political agenda in Turkey, but everything changed after a summer of extreme weather events, including forest fires on the Mediterranean coast and devastating floods in the north.

Action cannot come soon enough for indebted farmers like Keles in a country where droughts have spread to more than of the territory.

"My husband says leave the garden. But I can't. I've worked too hard for this. What can I do with it now?" she asks, despite having debts worth thousands of dollars.

This summer, farmers in her neighbourhood were unable to dig deep enough to find groundwater, so they had to fetch it in large tanks pulled by tractors.





A fountain in Akkuzulu, Turkey, is left dry by lack of rain.

### **'Serious events coming'**

Agriculture is a major sector of the Turkish economy, accounting for around six percent of GDP and employing 18 percent of the workforce.

Turkey is self-sufficient in food production and is the world's seventh largest agricultural producer, exporting everything from hazelnuts to tea, olives to figs.

But the country's import of wheat has already risen exponentially in

nearly two decades from \$150 million to \$2.3 billion in 2019, according to the agriculture ministry.

Such figures add to fears Turkey will move from producer to becoming a country reliant on the outside to meet its food needs.

"Turkey has a lot to adapt to, especially in terms of agriculture because serious drought events are coming. What we have seen is nothing," warned Levent Kurnaz, director of Bogazici University's centre for [climate change](#) and [policy studies](#) in Istanbul.

Drought is forcing some farmers to quit while others opt to grow different crops that demand less water, leaving the consumer out of pocket as food prices rise alongside a weakening Turkish lira.

Food inflation hit 29 percent in August from last year, and in a bid to ease the pain, Erdogan cut import customs duties to zero for basics such as wheat, chickpeas and lentils until the end of the year.

Experts say the government has failed in its water management policies, exacerbating the problem.

Farmers are impacted by significantly reduced water levels in dams across Turkey, which put the water needs of every citizen at risk as well, while lakes are drying up.





Experts accuse President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of failing to do enough to address pressing environmental issues in the country.

"We need to build our cities in a way that allows underground [water levels](#) to rise," said Ceyhun Ozcelik, associate professor in the water resources department at Mugla Sitki Kocman University.

"If we don't take the necessary measures, if the urban infrastructure is not enough, then I can say we face difficult days in the years ahead," he added.

**'Transform lifestyles'**

In the west of the country on the Aegean coast, green olive groves coat the hills in Milas, famous for its olive oil which gained European Union protected status in December. But the fruit is also at risk.

Ismail Atici, Milas agricultural chamber chief, said rain had not fallen at all in 2021.

"If there is still no rain for one, or two more months, the trees will not be able to nourish the fruits," he added.

Farmers' costs are spiralling.

Ferdun Cetinceviz, 41, who tends to some 200 cows and corn fields among the mountains, said he is losing up to 40,000 lira per month (\$4,500, 3,900 euros).

Surrounded by dry, flat land and green mountains in the distance, Cetinceviz estimated up to 50 percent of his crop yield including corn was lost this year due to drought.

Farmers in Milas used to grow cotton, but it requires vast quantities of water, so they switched to corn.

"If I can't water my crops which my animals also need, they will be left hungry," Cetinceviz said.

© 2021 AFP

Citation: Severe droughts dry up dreams of Turkish farmers (2021, October 5) retrieved 25 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-10-severe-droughts-turkish-farmers.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is

provided for information purposes only.