

Central China farmers face crop failures in 'withering' drought

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Recent years have brought a long list of extreme weather events to China.

Farmer Bao Mingchen gestured to a dry pipe where water typically irrigates a patch of crops, the soil now cracked under a drought hitting China's vast agricultural hinterland.

"Everything is dry," he said as he strode along the perimeter of a rice paddy near his home in Hudian, a humble township in the central Chinese province of Henan.

The [rice plants](#) still shine a radiant green but Bao, puffing on a cigarette, told AFP that the local farmers are beginning to worry about how much longer they can go without rain.

Recent years have brought a long list of extreme weather events to China, including destructive floods and record-breaking heat waves that experts say are made more frequent by global climate change.

Even as parts of central China were hit by drought, [heavy rains](#) and landslides across the south killed four people and left more than a dozen missing this week.

The weeks-long dry spell striking central China has led many farmers to hold off on planting as agricultural authorities warn of damage to crops.

A short drive down the road from Bao's home, 70-year-old reservoir manager Liu told AFP that the area hadn't seen any significant rain since April.

"The [drought conditions](#) currently are very severe," said Liu, who gave only his surname, as he stood on the bank of the reservoir, the unusually low level of which was emphasized by a ring of stained concrete.

Liu's reservoir serves as an important water source for the surrounding area, where farmers grow crops such as rice and corn.

"If it doesn't rain there'll be a loss of the reservoir, and those farmers' rice paddy fields—they will have to be saved," he said.

"If it really doesn't rain, (the crops) will all die."



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'All withered'

Nearby, a 59-year-old woman [farmer](#) surnamed Wang arranged bushels of Chinese mugwort, a fragrant herb used in [traditional medicine](#), along the side of the road.

"Look at it, it's all withered," Wang said.

"The bottom half is dead already. There are a few sprouts at the top but they're also about to dry up."

Across the road, Wang showed AFP a patch of crumbling dry soil where corn typically grows.

In a stroke of bitter irony, a sprinkling of measly raindrops fell for a couple of minutes, quickly evaporating on the scorching ground before the pale clouds dissipated beneath the blinding sun.

Wang said she hoped authorities could harness the power of technology to help local farmers through the drought.

"With advanced technology and artificial rainfall, there'd be some hope for us," she said.

"But if there's really no rain, average folks like us will face total crop failure," she said.

"That's just how it is."

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