

News Details

News Details

11.07.2018

Drought causes discomfort for Europe's dairy farmers



Photo: A. Sauvage

Large parts of Europe have experienced major losses due to the continued heatwave. After a wet spring in countries like Ireland, the United Kingdom and France, the dry weather is now negatively affecting pastures, hay and silage production as well as cereal and straw production. As a consequence of the drought, milk producers are missing key, self-produced feed. One can expect production costs to rise due to bought-in feed and the milk yield to suffer.

Ireland

After a wet spring, Irish producers have had to deal with many weeks of hot weather and major droughts. Due to the poor grass growth and burnt pastures, dairy farms must already forgo certain areas or use silage for feed. In addition to the lower feed quality, the milk yield is also going to shrink due to the looming water shortage. Increased consumption has led to water resources running dry. There is currently a nation-wide ban on watering gardens, filling swimming pools, washing cars, etc.

Germany

The ongoing drought in eastern and northern Germany is getting worse. Fires are already breaking out in fields and forests in the east – in certain regions in the area, there has been no rain worth mentioning since April. In an attempt to address the feed scarcity, some German Federal States have allowed ecological focus areas to be used for feed. In the west, south-west and the Alps, in contrast, major damage was caused by storms well into June. The yield of this year's feed harvest is going to be well below average. The very poor cereal harvest implies a significantly lower amount of cereals for feed and thus a shortage of straw production. The production of grass silage will also shrink due to the drought.

France

In the south of the country, crop farming with regular watering of crops has become the most common agricultural activity, with livestock farming, including dairy farming, gradually disappearing. In the other regions of France, milk from only pasture grazing becomes complicated, as it usually needs to be supplemented with other feed. As we see again this year, the distribution of rainfall over the year in each region, and even in each commune, depends a lot on where storms occur. It therefore becomes more and more difficult to manage fodder for animals. Stocks must be maintained throughout the year to compensate for increasingly heterogeneous harvests. Producing a litre of milk or a kilo of meat becomes increasingly

complicated.

Belgium

Belgium is usually associated with constant rain, however currently no precipitation is in sight. Dairy cows are suffering from heat stress, which compromises animal health and welfare, and eventually reduces milk yield. Milk producers are already obliged to buy in feed or dip into winter reserves. The third grass cutting will not happen, and this will probably be the fate of the fourth cutting as well if there is no rain in August and September. This in itself means smaller winter reserves. Maize yields are satisfactory and will only be lower in dry areas.

Denmark

The heatwave is also causing issues in Denmark. The 'Drought Index' (Tørkeindeks) reached its peak in early July at 10 points. In comparison, the index was at zero in summer last year. The meagre grass growth without watering has only allowed for an average 1.5 cuttings to date. Watering implies more work and greater costs for milk producers. There is very little straw and some farmers are already buying from the neighbouring Netherlands. Loss of 30-50% are expected for the cereal harvest; projections for maize silage nonetheless are still positive. This bottleneck in terms of local feed is an especially pressing challenge for organic dairy farmers.

Italy/South Tyrol

Italy has started the growing season with a wet spring; in South Tyrol a snowy winter has provided good soil moisture. In Vinschgau, South Tyrol, a dry period of several weeks allowed for good hay quality. The driving of cattle to alpine pastures took place a little earlier this year, as plenty of vegetation was available. Dry periods alternate with rainy phases.

Lithuania

May and June were extremely dry in Lithuania. Milk producers were unable to prepare sufficient feed, as due to the draught the second cut did not succeed to grow. This draught has significantly affected the income of Lithuanian milk producers. In addition to low milk prices, farmers also face losses related to decreased milk yields and a reduced fat and protein content of milk, which determine the raw milk price. Bottlenecks for feed are predicted for the winter season.

Spain

In contrast to many other countries, our member association from northern Spain is reporting favourable weather conditions. The early part of the year was good for feed production as compared to the low prices in previous years. Market prices for cereals have also decreased thanks to the good harvest forecasts. We have to wait and see how the price for feed cereals evolves.

[<<< back](#)