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Heat waves and storms: How are they affecting Europe's dairy farmers?



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Many European countries have been dealing with a drought for a few months now. According to the Copernicus service on monitoring climate change, July 2019 was the hottest month since 1880, when periodic measurements were introduced. Especially in Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, heat records were smashed. Drought makes things difficult for Europe's dairy farmers. The European Commission has, therefore, published a [press release](#) that states that farmers can apply for higher advance payments. They can request up to 70% of direct payments instead of 50%, and 85% of rural development payments as early as mid-October.

You can read more about the specific situations in some of our member countries below:

Belgium

Milk and meat production in Belgium have decreased due to the heat wave in late July. Especially Western and central Wallonia are very dry. The east, on the other hand, has been able to maintain better pastures thanks to more rain. In some regions, milk producers have already had to dip in to their winter reserves as there is no new grass due to the drought.

France

The regions in central and eastern France are facing a major drought. Livestock farmers in drought-stricken areas have already started using their winter feed reserves. A decrease in the number of heads of cattle has also been observed as many dairy farmers have sold off part of their herd because of the scarcity of feed. In an attempt to counteract this trend, 69 Departments have decided to exceptionally allow mowing of fallow land. Cereal and rape seed harvests are good, while maize harvests are very poor. Maize silage was introduced as early as August, though this is usually only done in late September.

Germany

Contrary to 2018, the regional and, to an extent, local situation in Germany is highly varied. Some regions received occasional rain, while other areas have received less than 60mm/m² since April. Federal aid is being provided in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia, Rhineland-Palatinate, North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Bremen and parts of Bavaria. In these areas, farmers can use fallow land or ecological focus areas (EFAs) for feed under certain conditions.

Netherlands

Farmers have had to deal with the drought in the Netherlands as well, especially in the eastern provinces. Milk producers are already obliged to buy in feed or dip in to winter reserves. High feed prices, especially for maize, and the falling milk price have led to tight finances. Furthermore, the number of rodents has increased en masse in the north of the Netherlands. They damage the grass root, lead to harvest losses, and generate further expenses.

Luxembourg

After a very warm and dry June and July with a new record of 40.8 degrees, there was some rainfall in August. In addition, a major tornado hit southern Luxembourg on 9 August, and caused significant damage.

The winter crop harvests were within the annual average, but things do not look good for the summer food-grain harvest. Rye and triticale have fallen off the ergot. The first and second cutting were, on an average, good; however, the third and fourth were very poor and sometimes non-existent. Grazing on pastures for dairy cows continues to be difficult. Furthermore, voles have also increased exponentially due to the drought – like in the Netherlands. All these reasons mean that dairy farmers have to buy in feed. In some cases, they are selling off heads of cattle to compensate for some of the generated costs.

Switzerland

Even in Switzerland, the weather was very heterogeneous from region to region. The Vaud canton in Romandy experienced a heatwave in June and in the following months as well. This led to a decrease in grass and crop production. The general situation, nonetheless, is not as catastrophic as compared to previous years thanks to regular downpours during the many storms. However, the canton of Jura is dealing with a relatively severe drought. These conditions have led to the implementation of agricultural emergency measures in some cantons. For example, farmers are allowed to mow biodiversity promotion areas (BFF) or to let their livestock graze on them. The objective of these measures is to allow farmers to conserve their winter reserves.

Lithuania

The drought in Lithuania lasted from April to July, resulting in a negative impact in terms of feed production for many dairy farms. The cereals sector has also been severely affected. Food-grain quality is significantly worse as compared to the previous year. Milk prices have also been decreasing since April. Over 2000 dairy farms have discontinued milk production. These are mainly small farms and include a significant number from our Lithuanian member organisation. A difficult winter with major feed shortages and the closure of more farms is expected. Hopefully, the government will provide some relief.

[<<< back](#)