

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Drought Threatens Austrian Agriculture and Forestry

Country: Austria

Post: Vienna

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Agriculture in the News, Agriculture in the Economy

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Report Highlights:

Many Austrian regions have not received sufficient rain; spring 2020 is one of the driest on record. The lack of precipitation in combination with increased average temperatures and large temperature differences between night and day negatively impact plant germination and development. The most affected are sugar beets, rapeseed, grassland, forests, and vineyards; fodder or animal feed will be severely impacted. To what degree yields will be negatively affected depends on future precipitation and other weather conditions.

Summary

Since the beginning of winter many Austrian regions have not received sufficient rain; spring 2020 is one of the driest on record. The most affected areas are in south-east and north. The lack of precipitation in combination with increased average temperatures and large temperature differences between night and day negatively impact plant germination and development. Rainfalls in May may partially ease the situation. The most affected crops and agricultural sectors are spring crops, including sugar beets, rapeseed, grassland, forests, and vineyards. To what degree yields will be negatively affected depends on future precipitation and other weather conditions.

The impact of the drought on fodder (animal feed) production in some regions is disastrous. Because of the severe shortage of organic forage, producers in the province Styria were granted an exception to use conventional forage in organic cattle production. The exceptions are based on existing EU Organic Regulations.

Forty-five Percent Less Precipitation

Austria is experiencing one of the driest meteorological springs (starting March 1, 2020) in the history of their domestic record keeping. According to the Austrian Central Institute for Meteorology ([ZAMG](#)) and Geodynamics, in March and April 2020 there was 45 percent less precipitation over the entire country compared to the long-term average. In the 163-year record of measurements in Austria, in only ten other instances were the months of March and April as dry as 2020. Austria is contending with an already dry winter and therefore little water reserves in the soil, particularly in the south-eastern and northern regions. May rains will only partially ease the situation.

Temperature Impacts

Austrian soil is very dry this year not only because of the lack of precipitation as well as high temperatures and day/night temperature differentiation. In the lowlands of Austria, where most of the crop production takes place, this year's April was 2.1 degree centigrade (35.8 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than the long-term average and therefore one of the fifteen warmest Aprils since 1767. In addition, frost temperatures during the night and very warm temperatures during the day further stressed vegetation.

Most Affected Crops

Although most farmers planted spring crops deeper into the soil this year (in hopes that seeds might benefit from water reserves in lower soil), soil moisture – especially in southeastern Austria and in areas with sandy soils - was not sufficient for a homogeneous germination. Uneven germination will most likely result in reduced yields. Winter crops in most areas of Austria developed satisfactorily over the winter but now will also need more water for stem elongation. To what degree yields will be negatively affected depends very much on future precipitation and other weather conditions.

Sugar beets are one of the crops which is most affected by Austria's warm and dry weather conditions. These conditions may not only have a negative impact on the germination and development of the sugar beets but also support the rapid population increase of the beet weevil (*Bothynoderes punctiventris*).

Over the last decade, this beetle became a major issue in the Austrian sugar beet production. Rapeseed plantings, particularly on light sandy soils will also not reach their yield potential.

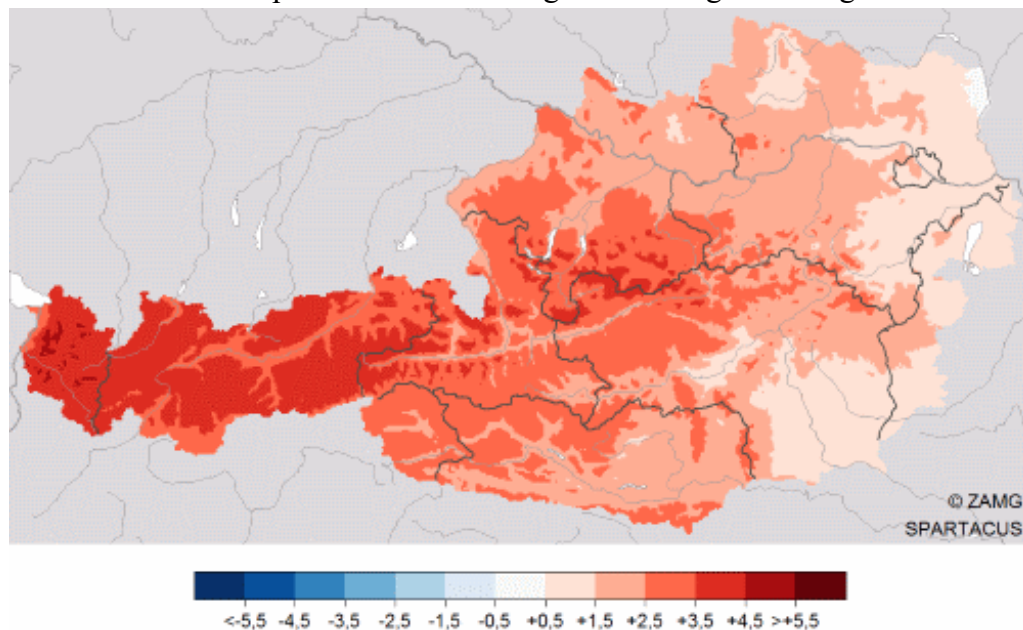
The impact of the drought on grassland for fodder production in some regions of Austria is disastrous. The most affected province of Austria in this regard is the south-eastern province Styria. Because of the severe shortage of organic forage, the province Styria granted an exception local producers to use conventional forage in organic cattle production. The exceptions are based on the EU Organic Regulation 834/2007 (Exceptions for catastrophes in the EU Organic Regulation 834/2007 - Article 22 2 f; and the Implementing Regulation 889/2008 - Article 47).

Another sector severely impacted by the drought is the forestry sector. Forest trees urgently need water and the dry and warm conditions favor the development and multiplication of the bark beetle (*Scolytinae sp.*) which is already a severe problem in Austrian forestry. Forests in some Austrian regions are so dry that there is a high risk of forest fires.

In addition, vineyards and orchards in the dry areas of Austria also suffer under the dry conditions.

Austrian Temperature April 2020

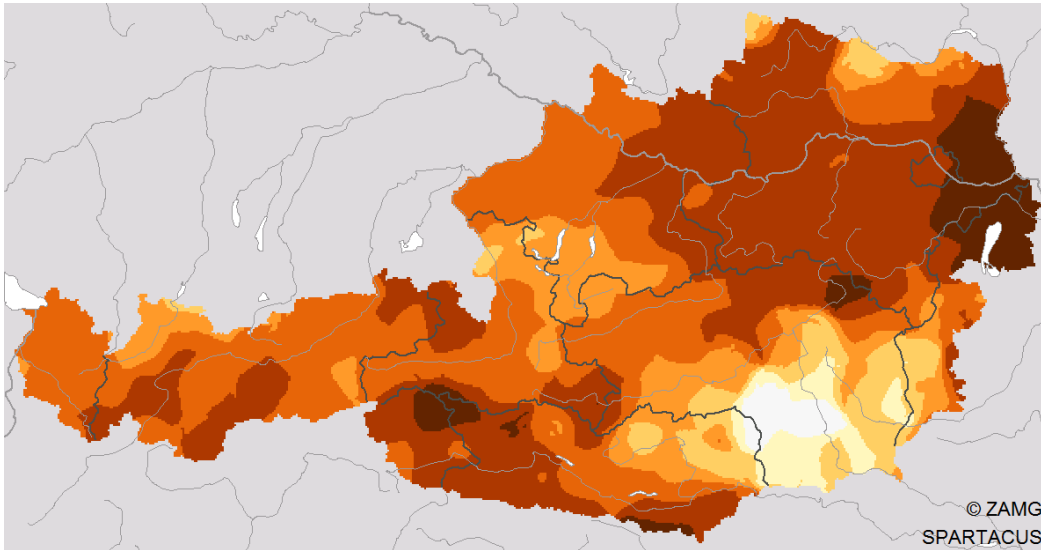
Deviation of the temperature from the long-term average in centigrade.



Source: Austrian Central Institute for Meteorology (ZAMG)

Austrian Precipitation April 2020

Comparison of the precipitation with the long-term average 1981-2010 in percent. 100 percent correspond to the average.



Source: Austrian Central Institute for Meteorology (ZAMG)

Attachments:

No Attachments.