

"A blessing": Hopeful Argentine farmers greet rain with relief, but still worried about risks to harvest - Reuters

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Sentiment:
Mostly Negative 

- Argentina was on track for record corn harvest, but crops deteriorating due to high temperatures, low rainfall
- Scattered rains in recent days bring relief, but rainfall has been uneven across country
- "Next week is crucial", farmers and experts say crops are still at risk

CHIVILCOY, Argentina, Feb 6 (Reuters) - Juan Solari threads his way between rows of corn, brushing past yellowing leaves and undersized ears that bear the marks of January's heat and lack of rain in Chivilcoy, a normally fertile farming area in Argentina's Pampas plains.

Argentina, one of the world's top food exporters, had been on track for a record corn harvest in the 2025/26 season, but unusually high January temperatures, topping 35 degrees Celsius in some areas, combined with low rainfall, strained crops across much of the country's agricultural heartland.

The Buenos Aires Grain Exchange on Thursday trimmed its estimate for Argentina's grain output to 57 million metric tons, down from a previous forecast of 58 million metric tons. The exchange has not yet published an updated outlook for the soybean crop.

Rains on Wednesday and Thursday - while far from enough to fully quench scorched crops - provided a welcome respite for farmers. With the light showers bringing some relief to his fields, Solari is hopeful there will be more.

"It's a blessing," Solari said as a drizzle settled over the Emidelia Solari ranch, where he is a partner and manager. "It changes expectations."

The ranch, which produces soybeans and corn near Chivilcoy, about 160 kilometers (100 miles) from Buenos Aires, has received 25 millimeters of rain since Wednesday — less than he had hoped for.

"The crops that were planted early, corn and soybeans, started off very well, but when January arrived, which is a fairly dry month, they were affected," Solari said, with the smell of damp earth hanging in the air.

"Now the game is February: if the rains are consistent, we can maintain very good potential," he added.

Soybean planting for the 2025/26 cycle has just finished in Argentina, while the corn harvest has begun, according to the Buenos Aires Grain Exchange.

In January, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated Argentina's corn crop at 53 million tons and its soybean harvest at 48.5 million tons for the 2025/26 season.

"The rain is a balm, it slows the current deterioration, but it's not a definitive solution," said German Heizenknecht, a climate analyst at Applied Climatology Consulting (CCA). "The harvest is still at risk, it's in a critical situation and will depend heavily on what happens."

Argentina's central farming belt would need more than 50 millimeters of rainfall to begin to recover, something that could start next week, according to Heizenknecht.

DISPARATE REALITIES

Recent rainfall was uneven across Argentina, lifting spirits in some areas while leaving most farmers on edge, aware that without more precipitation crops could deteriorate quickly.

"With these nine or 10 millimeters that have just fallen, it alleviates a little what we can expect, because apparently the drought has been cut off," said Eduardo Caruso of the Santa Ana ranch in the town of

Navarro, in Buenos Aires province, where he produces corn, soybeans, livestock and dairy.

Even after the rain, parts of Caruso's fields showed dry, cracked soil, underscoring the urgent need for more precipitation. He estimated his corn yield would fall to around 7 tons per hectare, from an earlier projection of 12.

Other farmers are making similar calculations.

"Everything was fine until December 20. In January it rained a little, but those were very hot days," said Jorge Bianciotto, manager of La Lucila ranch in the town of Pergamino.

Bianciotto estimated that yields for early-planted corn on his farm would drop by 30% to 7 tons per hectare, while soybean yields would also fall by about 30% to 3.3 tons.

"Next week is going to be crucial. If it doesn't rain, things are going to get complicated," he said.

(Reporting by Nicolás Misculin, editing by Cassandra Garrison; Editing by Chizu Nomiyama)

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