



By Emily French

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Drought crippling NZ farmers

North Island's poor rainfall could cost farmers over US\$5.82m, although the apple industry is thriving



Farmers on New Zealand's north island anticipate that this year's drought may be worse than that in 2008.

The president of Federated Farmer Waikato, James Houghton, has stated that unless rain arrives soon the drought could cost farmers more than the NZ\$7bn (US\$5.82) it cost in 2008.

Horticulture New Zealand chief executive Peter Silcock says if the lack of rain continues, water restrictions will pose difficulties for growers in irrigating their land.

"If you haven't got water, then people are unlikely to plant those crops,

so it may affect the availability of crops later in the year," he said.

Industry experts predict green vegetables will be most affected by drought.

While many farmers are struggling, apple growers are celebrating the dry weather as the ideal conditions for their fruit to thrive.

"We're seeing some great colour, some good volumes on the trees, and reasonably good sizes," said Pipfruit New Zealand's chief executive Alan Pollard.

Pollard said that, given that they are less affected by the drought, fruit growers are offering assistance to other farmers.

"Opportunities, for example, for any grazing around the land that our orcharders hold," he elaborated, "or the potential to graze stock between the trees."

Pipfruit New Zealand currently estimates the apple industry will produce 17m cartons of the fruit this season.