

Impacts of COVID-19 on Agricultural Water Management in Turkey

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General over view of the spread of the COVID-19 (could be collected from international archives)

The institutions and society saw the severity of the situation at an early stage, and thanks to the measures taken, the entry of the pandemic into our country was delayed as much as possible. After the arrival of the pandemic, Turkey has successfully maintained its resistance to this serious disaster owing to the facilities provided by our health and physical infrastructure <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/koronavirus-salginindaki-rol-ve-vizyonumuz-6-11-2020.en.mfa>.

The Early Warning and Response System (EWRS), which was created in 2007 for the surveillance and control of communicable diseases in Turkey, was activated its preparedness/contingency plans and began readiness activities in the first days 2020.

(<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/335803/WHO-EURO-2020-1168-40914-55408-eng.pdf>)

In March, Provincial Pandemic Boards were also established to manage the disease at the provincial level and some agricultural representatives were appointed members of the Provincial Pandemic Boards. c

Impacts on agriculture and lives in rural

Although production generally stopped in quarantined workplaces in other sectors, agricultural production continued when villages were even quarantined.

The Turkish government announced and provided specific support measures in order to mitigate the negative economic impacts of COVID-19 in Turkey. Institutions and organizations in the agricultural sector and farmers were among those allowed to apply for support. The most important forms of support are the part-time working allowance, concessional loan opportunities from public banks, deferral of credit debt by public banks, concessional loans offered by private banks under the Credit Guarantee Fund, and municipal supports.

(<https://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/en/home/library/poverty/covid-19-impact->)

Impacts on water resources management including domestic water

As part of the national COVID-19 measures, such as lockdown and flexible working, a rise in demand for domestic water was experienced as a result of more time spent at home. This increase was reported to vary between 5% and 30%.

Industrial consumption dropped throughout the country. For example, it was stated that industrial water use declined by 39.9% in the capital city Ankara while in Kocaeli, a highly industrialized city, this rate was reported as 9%.

(<http://suen.gov.tr/Suen/en/catdty.aspx?val=465>)

Impacts on agricultural water management

Agricultural activities such as planting, harvesting and irrigation were exempted from mandatory curfews in order to sustain agricultural production and food security.

Treated wastewater is primarily used for irrigation of green areas. The Ministry of Environment and Urbanization issued a Circular titled as “COVID-19 Pandemic and Measures on Wastewater Management” on April 8th, 2020 to regulate the reuse of treated wastewater during the pandemic. The Circular stipulates that wastewater used for irrigation purposes (both crops and green areas) must be disinfected. Furthermore, a guide book titled as “Assessment of COVID-19 Virus Transmission Risk from the Perspective of Wastewater Reuse” was published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry that served as an instrumental source in the period.

(<http://suen.gov.tr/Suen/en/catdty.aspx?val=465>)

Measures taken for the impacts, including governmental

The Ministry of Health convened the Coronavirus Scientific Advisory Board (CSAB), bringing together experts from different medical disciplines.

One of the important and critical outputs, especially at the beginning, was drafting of the National 2019-nCoV disease guidelines that set the stage for prevention, mitigation and containment. The first guideline was replaced with multiple new guidelines, which were prepared considering the latest scientific evidence . CSAB meetings were later moved to a video conference platform as social distancing regulations were promulgated. Realizing the importance of risk communication, an online messaging platform was also established to ensure a constant communication channel between the Board and stakeholders. With evolution of the pandemic, as the needs grew and priorities got added, more experts/scientists were added to the Board, allowing additional technical subgroups to work on emerging priority areas and concerns.

(<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/335803/WHO-EURO-2020-1168-40914-55408-eng.pdf>)

Challenges for the future gained from the experience

As available workforce and balance of incomes and expenses fluctuate dramatically in these times, innovative measures as well as rapid and dynamic decision-making in order to respond to the crises have become necessities.

It is well known that each crisis offers an opportunity.

Digital solutions such as implementation of automation (including automated customer interfaces) and remote-control processes will rise dramatically in importance to secure crisis preparedness and resilience of the services. Sharing experiences and good practices and having these documented in detail for future generations are other critical aspects in the adaptation process.



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