

April 2026

Updated prospects for irrigation - forecast for 2026

Overall irrigation prospects

Our updated prospects for irrigation across England for 2026 are **Good to Moderate**. The irrigation prospects reflect the water situation using current river flows, groundwater conditions, latest available weather forecasts and Met Office seasonal outlooks.

Water resource situation

A wet winter has helped improve the water resources situation and as of March 2026, all areas of England have returned to normal status. 2025 experienced the driest spring across England since 1893, leading to drought conditions across much of the country. The autumn and winter were very wet and England overall received 126% of the long term average (LTA) rainfall during this period.

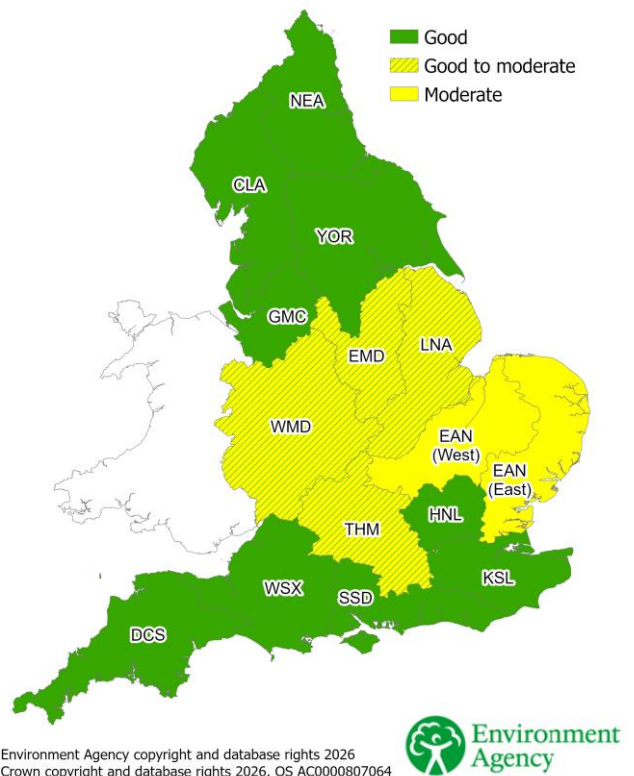
Recently drier and settled conditions became more established during March, especially across southern, central and eastern England. England received overall 83% of LTA rainfall during March but rainfall totals did vary across the country: Cumbria and Lancashire received 149% LTA rainfall while Kent and South London and East Sussex received 52% LTA rainfall

The settled weather has extended into April and it has been very dry particularly across the east and south-east. Up to the 28 April, England overall has only received 37% of LTA rainfall.

Following the predominantly dry weather during the spring so far, river flows continue to decrease at indicator sites with 45% of river flows classed as normal and half are now below normal or lower for the time of year. Five indicator sites across East Anglia, Wessex and Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are classed notably low for the time of year.

By the end of March, Soil Moisture Deficit (SMD) patterns across England were mixed reflecting rainfall patterns. Northern areas had wetter soils compared to averages, while southern areas were drier than expected. SMD levels in central and eastern England were broadly close to average. Soils have continued to dry sharply during April and are as dry as they were at the end of April 2025 across eastern and south east England, while in south-west England they are drier than last year. Elsewhere soils are slightly wetter than last year.

Figure 1 - Updated Irrigation Prospects spring-summer 2026



Groundwater levels responded to the wet weather during winter and by the end of March, all groundwater sites reported nationally were classified as normal or higher for the time of year. However, during March reduced rainfall and an increasing soil moisture deficit brought an end to the recharge season across most aquifers. Seasonal recessions in groundwater levels have largely continued during April with levels in the Cotswolds now notably low for the end of April.

More information on the water situation is available at [Water situation reports for England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/water-situation-reports-for-england).

Irrigation reservoirs

Most farm irrigation reservoirs sufficiently refilled over the winter, although there has been an early start to the irrigation season for many farmers. If the dry weather persists, demand on irrigation storage reservoirs is likely to increase. We are therefore advising farmers to closely monitor reservoirs through the remainder of spring and into summer and to contact the Environment Agency as soon as possible if you have any concerns.

Long range weather forecast

The May bank holiday weekend will be unsettled and after it is likely to return to drier weather. May is looking to continue this mixture of weather with a series of dry periods followed by showers or longer spells of rain. Temperatures are likely to be close to or slightly above normal.

More information on weather forecasts is available at the [Met Office](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk)

Irrigation prospects for individual Environment Agency areas

Environment Agency Area	Prospects for 2026
Cumbria and Lancashire	Good
Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	Good
East Anglia East (covering Essex Norfolk and Suffolk)	Moderate
East Anglia West (covering Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire)	Moderate
East Midlands	Good to Moderate
Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire	Good
Hertfordshire and North London	Good
Kent, South London and East Sussex	Good
Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire	Good to Moderate
North East	Good

Solent and South Downs	Good
Thames	Good to Moderate
Wessex	Good
West Midlands	Good to Moderate
Yorkshire	Good

Definitions

Prospects for spray irrigation are defined as 'Good', 'Moderate' or 'Poor'.

Good Water levels are average or above average, and supplies are expected to be safe. There is a possibility of minor local controls on abstraction from surface water later in summer if the weather is exceptionally hot and dry.

Moderate Water levels are low. Some controls on surface water abstraction are possible by midsummer if the weather is hot and dry. Controls on abstraction from groundwater are possible in small, sensitive groundwater areas.

Poor Water levels are well below average. Soil moisture deficit is developing early and significant restrictions on abstraction from surface and groundwater are probable.

Support for abstractors this year

With an early start to the irrigation season, we are encouraging irrigators to take early action and consider the following actions to help manage and safeguard water supplies for the summer and beyond.

- Contact the Environment Agency as soon as possible to discuss any concerns on your water needs this year and the options and actions available to you
- Review your licences to ensure you comply with your abstraction licence conditions. Contact the Environment Agency if you have questions about your licence conditions
- Sign up to water abstraction alerts if it is relevant to your licence. The Environment Agency has developed a secure [Managing Water Abstraction Service](#) on GOV.UK for abstractors, and over 10,000 abstractors have already registered. We are encouraging abstraction licence holders to register so they can submit abstraction returns easily and quickly online and see a summary of licences while in the field. Environment Agency area teams are now using the service to send abstractors Water Abstraction e-Alerts when hands-off conditions are coming into force or being lifted
- Short term options are available to improve your access to water outside of your licence conditions during prolonged dry weather and drought. Further information can be found in our guidance [water abstraction during prolonged dry weather and drought](#).
- Our Regulatory Position Statement on abstraction of floodwater outside of licence conditions is available to support abstractors. The statement applies to the abstraction of water during flooding at times of year

customer service line
03708 506 506

incident hotline
0800 80 70 60

floodline
03459 88 11 88

that are not included within the licence conditions, or at instantaneous, hourly, or daily rates that exceed the licence quantities. Further information can be found in our [Regulatory Position Statement](#) guidance.

- Apply for a Local Resource Option screening study with growers in your area to improve drought resilience. More detailed information on case studies can be found on our [Engagement page](#).
- Consider trading water with other licence holders to improve access to water supplies. You can find out more about trading water rights on gov.uk or find abstractors with potential for trade on our [water trading map](#).
- Consider joining a Water Abstraction Group in your area. Several local liaison groups already exist for this purpose, and these groups help share information, increase knowledge of water regulation and best practices. More information can be found in our full area irrigation report and on the [UKIA](#) website