



SUN-TRIBUNE FILE PHOTO

There was more rain in 2010, when Jim Hulshof (left), Michael Grifoni (right) and David Beloff harvested cauliflower on the Hulshof farm on Bloomington Road.

## YOU'RE BEING ASKED TO REDUCE WATER USE

The drought has prompted the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority to ask residents and businesses to lower their water usage.

"Low rainfall since mid-April has contributed to drought conditions, which can put stress on municipal water supplies," Tom Hogenbirk, manager of engineering, said in a statement.

"While we did see some rain in parts of the watershed this past weekend, it wasn't enough to counter the effects of the hot, dry weather over the last couple months. Until we see enough rain to bring us out of the early drought stage, we're encouraging all water users to conserve, including businesses, aggre-

gate operations, golf courses, water bottlers, farms and residents," he concluded.

Current conditions in the watershed meet the Ministry of Natural Resources' first level of low water conditions, which is the first indication of a potential water supply problem, the conservation authority said.

Residents and businesses are asked to conserve water by following municipal outdoor water use bylaws, which restrict watering to specific days and times.

Check with your local municipality to get those days and times.

You can also find information on the websites for the provincial ministries of natural resources, environment and agriculture. Visit [ontario.ca](http://ontario.ca) for the ministry site in which you are interested.

— Lisa Queen

# Wanted: Four-day rainfall

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I'm going to call it half a year where they're going to get half a crop, more than anything else. Anything that is a shallow-rooted crop, it's a tough go. I know that for sure. I have about 10 acres of oats. It's a half a crop. There's hardly anything there. There's just no moisture," he said.

"I find it very difficult to establish any plants, if you're trying to transplant, because there's just no soil moisture to start off with. And if you're seeding sweet corn and stuff like that, it's very difficult for germination just because it's not there, the moisture. So, that's tough."

Even when it has rained a handful of times since the beginning of May, it has often arrived as torrential showers, which has made it difficult for arid land to absorb the water, Hulshof said.

"You need a gentle rain at first just to soften it up just to absorb some of the water. That's the problem now, when you do get rain now, it just runs off, it doesn't help at all," he said, adding the mild winter meant little snow melted into the ground.

Last Friday night's storm created severe flooding in the Holland Marsh.

On the positive side, the lack of humidity this season has meant less disease and fewer insects attacking crops, Hulshof said.

Phil Smalley, who owns a 1,400-acre farm in Mount Albert that produces potatoes, soybeans, corn and wheat, said the dry weather is hurting production.

"It's definitely having an effect on the crops. We do have some irrigation, but we can't water every acre that we crop, maybe 15 per cent of that," he said.

"It (the drought) is definitely going to have a yield effect, sure. You don't really know until you harvest it, eh? But the corn yield is going to be down, and the soybeans. The wheat is not going to be as big kernels as normal. And that and the potatoes, the yield on them is going to be definitely going to be down by, I would say, compared to a normal year, the yield is going to be down by at least 25 per cent."

Some areas are hurting from the drought even more than Mount Albert, Smalley said.

Environment Canada's Phillips agrees, although he said most areas of York Region and southern Ontario are suffering from the dry conditions to some degree.

"Dryness is everywhere in York Region, with degrees of dryness varying between south and north," he said.

For example, Canada Day storms brought only 3.5 millimetres of rain in Buttonville, while the unofficial total in Aurora was 11.1 mm. Last Friday night, only 2.8 mm fell at Buttonville, while the unofficial amount in Aurora was 12.5 mm. Pointing out how difficult it is for the parched land to absorb a quick deluge of rain, Phillips said all areas need some steady precipitation.

"What we need is a four-day rainfall with 15 to 20 mm each day. Not all in one hour because most of it will not go to work for you. (The rains) fill the sewers and cause intersection flooding but they don't really get down to the root zone," he said.

"We're not quite to the dog days of summer, but people are already abuzz with how dry it's been and how warm."

At Buttonville, where there is an Environ-

ment Canada weather station, about 90 mm of rain fell in May, June and up to July 11, less than half the 188 mm that would normally fall during that time, Phillips said.

"Each of those months, those periods, was less than normal so it's been consistently dry and it's been really dry particularly in the last three or four weeks. Most of that rain that occurred in June was really in the first 10 days," he said.

"It's really been scorching in the last four weeks. The farmers are really hurting."

From June 12 to July 11, less than 10 mm of rain fell at Buttonville, where there would normally be 75 to 80 mm. There have also been 12 days in the region so far since May where the temperature has climbed above 30C, compared to seven days in a typical late spring and early summer, Phillips said.

"While the averages have been above normal, they haven't really been record-breaking at all," he said.

"That is, if you stuck a thermometer into York Region for May, June, July, it certainly wouldn't be any memorable temperatures (because there hasn't been much humidity this year). It's been more like a desert heat than a tropical heat, although that's going to change this week because we are going to get some Caribbean air coming up."

**'This has been great beer drinking weather, but it hasn't been great for people depending on moisture from a growing point of view. There's fire bans out there and watering bans, too...'**

David Phillips  
Environment Canada

Last year, by this same time, York Region had had one day above 30C and 244 mm of rain had fallen at Buttonville compared to this year's 90 mm.

"It's an enormous contrast. It's almost as if last year was too wet and too cool and this year has been too hot and too dry for too long. Last year, there was too much weather and this year, there's been not enough," Phillips said.

"This has been great beer drinking weather, but it hasn't been great for people depending on moisture from a growing point of view. There's fire bans out there and watering bans, too... It's good for youthful people who like to drink beer, the muscle shirt and tank top crowd."

There were calls for rains late this week, although Phillips remains skeptical they will do much good, if they come at all.

"It's only 40 per cent (chance), it's not a done deal. We've had a lot of these, 30, 40 per cents and it just didn't happen. Maybe it happened in your front yard but not your backyard," he said, adding the rest of July and August will likely be warmer than normal.

"These are not the rescue rains that growers really need, although they won't turn their back on it."

Which leaves Hulshof continuing to watch the sky for rain.

"Sometime, even with the prediction of 100 per cent rain, it just blows away. That's the sign of a dry year a lot of times when that happens," he said.

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