

Climate Witness José Luis Oliveros Zafra (Spain):

“My name is José Luis Oliveros Zafra, and I’m from Villanueva de Alcardete, a town in the region of Castilla La-Mancha in Spain.

I’ve been working in the fields since the age of 18, but this year’s drought is the worst I can remember. It hasn’t rained all spring and summer, and because of the lack of water we have lost 100 per cent of our leguminous and cereal harvest. Farmers all across the country have been hit by the drought.



But it’s not the first time we’re suffering from climate change. We’ve been noticing climate impacts for many years now. Unfortunately the problems have increased massively over the past few years, and nowadays it’s also affecting us financially.

Over the last few years the seasonal cycle has changed: we go from summer to winter and from winter to summer. Spring and autumn seem to have disappeared completely, and these changes have occurred so suddenly, that they are affecting our farming cycles seriously.

We can’t adjust the farming cycle to all these unexpected frosts that occur at the most unusual dates, or to unexpected heatwaves that arrive much earlier than they used to.

It seems that the weather has gone crazy: summer and winter get mixed up when you have snow in May and extreme heat in February like this year. That’s just not normal.

When I was 10 years old, there was a stream in lowlands of my hometown. I used to go there to listen to the frogs croak and to look for watercress, but now there are no frogs and there is no stream. And you can’t find watercress anywhere. My parents and grandparents used to tell me about rain storms in their times, lasting up to a month or two. Personally, I can also remember that it used to rain for two or three months, non-stop from September till November.

If it doesn’t rain during sowing season, then you know that it won’t rain later. The years go by and there is less rain and more drought. It keeps getting hotter, and we suffer more insect plagues. This year they’ve suffered locust plagues in Villatobos, a place near here. Such things usually happen in the Canary Islands, but we are in the centre of the Iberian Peninsula. It’s the first locust plague in Castilla-La Mancha I know of.

You can’t make the climate go back to how it was. That’s already a sad reality, or at least that’s how we, the Spanish farmers, see it.

But there is one thing that you *can* do, and I hereby urge you to do it: Please don’t lose any time to take the measures needed to ensure that climate change is less abrupt. If the changes keep coming as fast as they currently do, we have no chance to adapt to them.”



Biography

José Luis Oliveros Zafra lives in Villanuevo del Alcarduete, a town in the region of Castilla La-Mancha in Spain. He is a farmer and, like so many other farmers in his region, he has suffered huge losses because of climate impacts. The climate has become unpredictable, making agriculture difficult. José Luis is 46 years old, married and father of three children.

Background

In 2005, Spain is undergoing the worst drought since the beginning of data registration 120 years ago. Water rationing has been implemented in large parts of the country and in some regions crop yields are down by 100 per cent. Spain has asked the EU for aid in cereals because Spanish farmers haven't been able to cover the country's demand this year. Climate modelling suggests that, if global greenhouse gas emissions continue at the current rate, by 2020, one in two summers in Spain are likely to be as hot as the record-breaking summer of 2003. Spain is warming faster than other parts of the world. If global average temperatures rise by 2°C above pre-industrial levels, Spanish summer inland temperatures are likely to rise by an average of 4 to 5°C. The centre of Spain will potentially experience an extra six weeks of days with temperatures over 35°C. Spain's coastal areas could experience an average of two extra weeks above 35°C. In June 2005, the Spanish government suggested that a third of the country could become desert-like as climate change exacerbates the loss of topsoil caused by overgrazing.