

The frosts that hit France last week have been described as having the most severe impact on the agricultural industry in recent memory.

At least a third of French wine production worth almost €2 billion in sales will be lost this year after rare freezing temperatures devastated many vines and fruit crops across France.

The destruction has hit a swathe of the country, including Bordeaux, Burgundy, the Rhône Valley and Provence, damaging vines but also hitting growers of kiwifruit, apricots, apples and other fruit as well as crops such as beet and rapeseed.

The unseasonal wave of bitter frost and ice hit suddenly after a bout of warm weather, which worsened the damage. The warmth had encouraged vines and fruit trees to develop earlier than usual, only to be withered by the sudden cold.

"This is probably the greatest agricultural catastrophe of the beginning of the 21st century," French agriculture minister Julien Denormandie said this week as the government declared an "agricultural disaster" and began preparing emergency financial measures.

"Several hundreds of thousands of hectares have been impacted," Denormandie added. The wine sector and the stone fruit, especially the apricots and the cherries, are among the most affected.

Much of the fruit that had already passed flowering and fruit set will not be harvested this year, according to Françoise Roch, president of the National Federation of Fruit Producers (FNPF). She added that the Rhône valley and the region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, for example, "are areas that had never seen such cold temperatures this time of year. Only the farmers that were able to protect their production will make it."

Daniel Sauvaitre, president of the National Apple Pear Association (ANPP), told AFP: "Peaches, nectarines and apricots will not be easy to find on the shelves this year. The challenge is to know if there are enough flowers left that are still green to get a harvest. And it's only mid-April, there could still be frost until early May."

Writing on his blog, Sauvaitre also said that "three nights of frost successively affected almost all apple and pear producing regions in France."

He added: "This year's abundant flowering still allows hope for a harvest. It will depend on the varieties, the stage of the vegetation and the conditions in which pollination will take place."

"But as always, we will have to wait until mid-May to finally be able to make the first counts and evaluate the harvest to come. After the protection against hail and against drought, protection against frost can no longer be optional but another imperative for the agronomic and economic success of an orchard."

President Emmanuel Macron tweeted a picture of vineyards lit by candles, expressing support for farmers whom he said were fighting "night after night" to protect crops.

À vous, agriculteurs qui, partout en France, avez lutté sans relâche, nuit après nuit, pour protéger les fruits de votre travail, je veux vous dire notre soutien plein et entier dans ce combat. Tenez bon ! Nous sommes à vos côtés et le resterons. pic.twitter.com/uaW9TmPxYh

— Emmanuel Macron (@EmmanuelMacron) [April 10, 2021](#)