

The blistering temperatures felt in the Northwestern U.S. over recent days have been scorching crops while also threatening farmers and farmworkers, according to the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Last week the region experienced some of its hottest temperatures ever, with some cities and towns surpassing previous record highs by double digits.

The heat wave, which is unquestionably related to anthropomorphic climate change, is deeply concerning for a number of reasons, the NFU said on Friday.

"For one, heat can be extremely deadly, especially in regions that don't experience it often and don't have infrastructure built for it. The Northwest is typically cooler than other parts of the country, and many residents do not have air conditioning as a result," it said.

"Without respite from sweltering temperatures, hundreds of people likely succumbed to heat stress." It added that a tally of fatalities had not been finalized.

Statistically, many of the deceased are food chain workers. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, 1 in 5 victims of heat-related deaths nationally are agricultural workers, fishers, forestry workers, and hunters, who usually spend eight or more hours working outside every day.

"Beyond its serious health implications, the crushing heat creates other problems for the agricultural industry. Most crops can't withstand three-digit temperatures for sustained periods, which can cause sunburn, shriveling, and stunted growth," the NFU said.

"Though some farmers have tried to stem crop loss by harvesting early, the dangerous working conditions have made it difficult to stay out in the fields during the day."

It went on to say that infrastructure collapse is a less direct, but just as troubling consequence of extreme heat. In some places, asphalt roadways have softened, leading to cracks, buckling, potholes, and rutting - all of which can make roads unsafe for driving.

The region has also experienced rolling blackouts due to increased energy use from air conditioning. Both issues can affect agricultural production. For instance, road closures could prevent the transportation of crops and livestock to processing facilities and then to grocery stores and restaurants. Similarly, if blackouts affect processing facilities, the entire food supply chain could see significant disruptions.

"If that weren't enough, the high temperatures drive evaporation, which has worsened

already severe drought conditions across the West," the NFU said.

"For farmers, the lack of water is forcing them to make difficult choices like leaving fields fallow, ripping up nut trees, and culling livestock. The resulting dry vegetation is also increasing the risk of wildfire, which creates a whole new set of problems."