

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WHAT IS A DROUGHT?

Meteorologists have never agreed upon a single definition of the term "drought," chiefy, no doubt, because the conditions that constitute a drought in one part of the world would not be regarded as constituting one in another. In any one country, however, it is convenient, for statistical purposes, to assign a uniform meaning to the term. In a set of charts published some years ago in European Russia showing the frequency of droughts in that region, a drought was defined as a period of ten days with a total rainfall not exceeding 5 millimeters (0.20 inch). In a publication of the United States Weather Bureau a drought was taken to be a period of 30 days or more in which the precipitation does not amount to 0.25 inch in any 24 hours.

According to definitions used officially in Great Britain, an "absolute drought" is a period of more than 14 consecutive days without 0.01 inch on any one day, while a "partial drought" is a period of more than 28 consecutive days the mean rainfall of which does not exceed 0.01 inch per day.

From an agricultural point of view a drought implies something more than a mere deficiency of rain. It is a combination of conditions that have a parching effect on vegetation and its factors may include, besides the absence or scarcity of rain, low humidity, windy weather, high temperature and deficient soil moisture.

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