

WWF on Water Stewardship and the Courtauld Commitment 2025 Water Ambition

Bio

Conor Linstead is a Freshwater Specialist with WWF-UK, working on water stewardship and water use in agriculture. He works with UK businesses to help them identify and mitigate water risks in their operations and supply chains, both within the UK and internationally. To mark the launch of the Courtauld Commitment 2025 Water Ambition, Conor outlines common questions businesses need to ask about how they use this essential resource.

Why should businesses care about water risks?

Any business that depends on water, directly or indirectly, should be aware of the associated risks in their supply chains and operations and mitigate against them. Consider the following:

- The World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report has consistently featured water as one of the top five risks facing our economy in terms of projected impact¹.
- In 2017, global companies reported 3,770 water-related risks to CDP in their annual water risk disclosure²
- Agriculture accounts for 70% of total water use globally

UK businesses need to consider exposure to domestic water risks through operations and sourcing in the UK, but also about any international water risks in supply chains.

- **Flooding** can have a significant impact on business. Our natural capital stress test report showed that if we [continue with business as usual](#), a repeat of the 2013/14 UK floods in 2050 could lead to a 70% increase in damages to property (£2.2bn, compared to £1.3bn in 2013/14), with housing and business accounting for more than half of the damage costs³.
- **Water scarcity:** The Environment Agency has shown that water resources are already under pressure in England, with reliable supplies not available for new business needs across much of the country⁴.
- **Pollution:** Water quality risks to UK business are likely to materialise as reputational damage from being publically identified as being responsible for, or associated with, water pollution from effluent discharges or poor practices in operations and supply chains.
- **Supply chain sustainability:** Recent joint work between WWF-UK and UNPRI (UN Principles on Responsible Investment) has identified, at a global level, which crops are most exposed to water risk, and which countries have the highest proportion of their cropland exposed to high water risks. Businesses sourcing these crops, or from these countries, should pay particular attention to the water risks they are exposed to in their supply chains.

¹ World Economic Forum Global Risk Report 2018 http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GRR18_Report.pdf

² CDP Water Report 2017 <https://www.cdp.net/en/research/global-reports/global-water-report-2017>

³ WWF 2017 <https://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/extreme-weather-could-cost-our-economy-billions>

⁴ Environment Agency. 2013. *The Case for Change: current and future water availability*. Available from: webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140328084622/http://cdn.environment-agency.gov.uk/geho1111bvep-e-e.pdf

Figure 1: Overall water risk for agriculture (crops) from WWF Water Risk Filter¹¹. Source: WWF (2015)

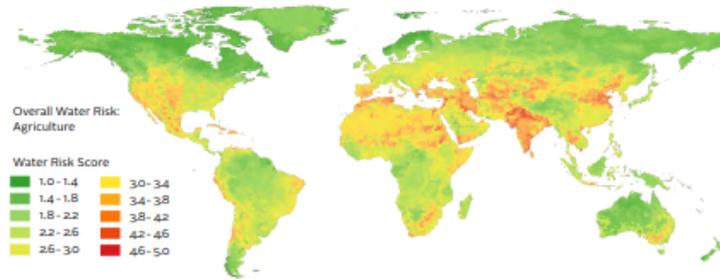


Table 2: Crop ranking by total volume of production in high water risk areas

Crop	Low risk	Medium risk	High risk
Cotton	10%	52%	38%
Mangoes, mangosteens and guavas	9%	53%	38%
Groundnut	10%	54%	36%
Apples	15%	55%	30%
Rice	12%	62%	26%
Wheat	15%	59%	26%
Sweet potato	5%	70%	25%
Watermelon	4%	71%	25%
Tomato	8%	68%	24%
Cucumbers and gherkins	8%	69%	23%
Onions	12%	66%	22%
Tangerines, mandarins, clementines and satsumas	12%	66%	22%
Green chillies and peppers	8%	72%	20%
Peaches and nectarines	9%	71%	20%
Cabbages and other brassicas	15%	65%	20%
Sugarcane	13%	68%	19%
Bananas	28%	54%	18%
Rapeseed	26%	57%	17%
Potatoes	18%	67%	15%
Grapes	13%	72%	15%
Oranges	8%	79%	13%
Sorghum	16%	73%	11%
Cassava	32%	59%	9%
Maize	25%	67%	8%
Barley	29%	65%	6%
Sugar beet	20%	75%	6%
Soybean	36%	60%	4%
Oil palm	70%	29%	1%
Yams	18%	81%	0%

Table 1: Proportion of cropland¹² at high water risk at a country level

Country	% cropland at high water risk
Algeria	65%
Uzbekistan	49%
Egypt	48%
India	46%
Morocco	39%
Pakistan	36%
Bangladesh	36%
Iran	33%
Cuba	31%
Thailand	28%
Nepal	18%
Sudan	16%
China	13%
South Africa	13%
Vietnam	13%
Turkey	12%
Spain	12%
Greece	11%
Niger	8%
Mexico	8%
Nigeria	5%
Chile	4%
Cambodia	4%
Peru	4%
Mali	3%
Ethiopia	2%
Kazakhstan	1%
USA	1%
Russia	1%
Indonesia	1%
Ukraine	1%

¹¹ Launched in 2012, the [Water Risk Filter](#) is a tool to help companies across the world assess their water risk. It assesses basin and operational water risk, and provides customised guidance on how companies can respond.

¹² Cropland data source: Ramankutty, N., Evan A.T., Monfreda C., and Foley J.A. (2008) Farming the planet: 1. Geographic distribution of global agricultural lands in the year 2000. *Global Biogeochemical Cycles*. 22 (1).

How can businesses address these risks?

Water stewardship involves businesses taking action to progressively improve their water management and deliver a reduction in water-related impacts of their own operations and in supply chains. It differs from good practice site level water management because businesses commit to sustainable management of shared water resources, for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Together with other businesses, communities, governments and NGOs, businesses must address water management at a catchment or national scale, ensuring operations are fair and sustainable. The Courtauld Commitment 2025 is a great example of sector-scale action to reduce water risk and

protect our planet's freshwater resources. At WWF-UK, we're really excited about the potential this initiative holds to improve the sustainability of our food and drink sector.

WWF-UK has produced a [step by step guide](#) so that companies can take action now to respond to the risks, and reap the benefits. A first step is to [map your business' water risks](#), and proactively manage risk by engaging strategically beyond your own 'four walls'. A critical part of water stewardship is fostering the collective action of stakeholders to deliver change at scale. The Courtauld 2025 Water Ambition is one of the first sector-scale initiatives to mobilise collective action for water. It has the potential to be a significant driving force for delivering sustainable water management in the areas where we grow our food, and WWF is encouraging businesses to join this effort.

Why is the Courtauld Commitment 2025 such a good way to tackle water risk?

We believe that the only way to tackle water risk at scale is for businesses and other stakeholders to come together to take action collectively and initiatives such as the Courtauld Commitment 2025 are a great way to do that. Our experience with partners such as M&S and Coca-Cola has shown us that businesses are able to take action within their own supply chains to reduce their risk in priority areas, but there are limitations to what one company can do alone. Many of the water risks that companies face derive from the collective use of water by everybody in a catchment. The risks can only be addressed by coming together with other businesses and catchment stakeholders to scale up and amplify their combined influence and action.

Liz Lowe, Sustainability Manager at Coca-Cola GB, commented: "Water is the number one ingredient in all our drinks but we believe no business can take this crucial resource for granted. Our water stewardship strategy sees us protecting the water sources we use, continually optimising the amount of water we use in our production processes and ensuring we return any waste water back to the environment. Through our partnership with WWF-UK, we're working directly with farmers on water sensitive and sustainable farming practices across areas where sugar beet, an ingredient in some of our drinks, is grown. We're also supporting them to improve land management, by protecting soils and reducing pollution from agricultural production: benefiting farmers and improving river health. The water ambition under the Courtauld Commitment [2025](#) is especially promising because it has the potential to take water stewardship to scale, maximising our collective positive impact."

If you'd like to find out more about our water stewardship work, please contact

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