

Fires Threaten Al-Ghab Plain Wheat Crop as Regime Forces Bomb Farms

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In addition to the heat which is affecting crops and creating fires across all agricultural lands in Syria, farmers in the Al-Ghab Plain, which is partially under opposition control, are racing to harvest their wheat crop, fearing it will be burned by regime bombardment of their land. The regime appears to be deliberately starting the fires in order to prevent farmers who have not obtained the approval of regime officers from cultivating their lands.

The Al-Ghab Plain covers about 241,000 hectares of land. The Orontes River and multiple irrigation channels run through it, making the area rich in water. Of that land, 87,000 hectares are designated for farming. The opposition controls around 8,000 hectares of that farmland. The risk of fires in this area increases during the summer due to the high temperatures and dry weather.

Widespread fires broke out east of the town of Al-Ziyareh on June 7, the result of 40 artillery shells targeting farmland there. Similar fires broke out earlier, on May 29, affecting around 20 hectares of wheat fields outside the town of Mansoureh after regime forces fired artillery rounds from the Jorin military base seven kilometres away. The burnt wheat crops belonged to a farmer who had rented the land at SYP 250,000 per hectare in order to cultivate it. Fires also broke out due to artillery shelling in Al-Qarqour, Al-Sermaniyeh and Al-Mashik in the northern part of the Al-Ghab Plain, destroying more than 15 hectares of wheat.

As a consequence, farmers in opposition-held areas of the Al-Ghab Plain have rushed to harvest their crops to avoid a similar fate, even bringing in additional harvest machines to carry out the job. Within two days in early June, farmers managed to harvest more than half of the wheat-cultivated zone of about 1,000 hectares.

The regime's targeting of agricultural lands during this year's harvest season indicates that no agreement has been reached to allow farmers to harvest, unlike previous years. It has become customary for regime forces to allow farmers in rebel-held areas near the frontline to cultivate their lands, though only after they [pay taxes](#) to officers.

However, the wheat harvests this season appears promising. The yield per hectare is 2.25-2.5 tons of wheat, with prices at SYP 1,024,000 per ton -- a good income for the farmers. If no agreement is reached to bar regime forces from burning the wheat, the opposition will lose a major, strategic crop that is not only a good source of income for the farmers but also partially compensates for losses from previous years.

Many people from the Al-Ghab Plain are still living in displacement camps in the northern part of the Idlib governorate. They have lived there since regime forces, supported by Russian air power, encroached on their towns and villages in early 2020. Because these towns and villages are so close to the frontline and often face bombardment, most landowners there have leased their properties to farmers, who accept the dangers of fire caused by the bombings.

Most recently, fires broke out on June 7 in wheat fields next to the village of Al-Haidariyeh, which is under regime control. Firefighters controlled the blaze, according to the state-run *SANA* news agency. The agency also warned farmers not to throw cigarette butts on the ground or light any fires, and to inform authorities of any fires that have broken out. From January until the end of May, 16 fires broke out in Al-Suqalbiyeh, Shatheh and Al-Bahseh, according to the head of the Centre for Forest Protection at the General Authority for Al-Ghab Management and

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Development.

Fires in Al-Ziyareh



Source: activists

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