threats to farmland

Farms today grow many more crops than they used to and produce vast amounts of food. However, at a time when the population is growing and people need more and more food, some farming methods and human activities are damaging farm soils. This reduces the amount of land people can use to grow food.

Spoiling soil

Topsoil, the layer of soil on the top of the land, is the fertile layer where plants grow. When topsoil becomes too dry, it can be blown or washed away. This kind of erosion is destroying many areas of farmland. Soil erosion can happen because of overgrazing, when too many animals eat the grass on an area of land.

FACT!

Healthy soil takes a long time to form. In some parts of the world soil is being worn out over 10,000 times faster than new soil can form to replace it.

The land in this part of China has turned to dust after being damaged by intensive farming methods.
Soil erosion also occurs because of heavy ploughing and digging, or the use of too many harsh chemical sprays. In some hot, dry areas big irrigation systems take so much water from the land that the soil dries up.

Spreading deserts
In some areas soil erosion has caused desertification. This is when soil becomes so dry, dusty, and low in nutrients that the land becomes desert. This is mainly a problem in countries that have hot, dry climates.

Soil degradation
At present about one-third of all the land across the world is used for farming. However, as soils around the world are degraded, or damaged, farmland is being lost. This map shows where on the planet the soil is degraded. Some areas have almost no plant life at all. This is mainly because this area is so very hot and dry. Soils that were once fertile and have been degraded are shown in red and orange.

This map shows levels of soil degradation throughout the world.