Thailand’s rice fields

No country provides more rice to the world than Thailand. The Thai government sometimes even limits the harvest to control the price of rice on world markets. However, as 2015 began, so did Thailand’s worst drought in a decade. The drought signals that, in the future, another force beyond governmental control may affect Thailand’s rice crop: climate change due to global warming.

Thailand’s rice crop is grown in fields flooded during the rainy season, which occurs from late spring to early fall. Later in the year, farmers irrigate their fields for a second crop. But climate change brings unpredictable weather that upsets this schedule. Early drought kills young rice plants, while heavy rains at season’s end ruin the harvest. Rising sea levels resulting from global warming can flood farmland along the coast. Scientists also worry that a rise in sea level could put the country’s capitol, Bangkok, under water.

Thailand is exploring ways to protect the city and the rice crop. These include flood barriers, growing rice on higher ground, and breeding varieties of rice that can grow in warmer weather.