

## Between hope and fear

### Crop failures and impending famines in the Rhineland

Various factors could have a negative impact on crop yields. Extreme weather events, pest infestations and plant diseases posed a threat to harvests. They could lead to crop failures, which in the worst case could result in famines.

Such exceptional weather events also occurred in the Rhineland. The 19th century, for example, was characterised by years that were too warm, too cold, too dry and too wet. In 1816, snow lay in some parts of the Eifel region until June, which ruined the potato harvest in particular. The devastating consequence was the famine of 1816/17.

Animals also became a threat to the harvest. Numerous insect species caused considerable damage, especially to already harvested grain and processed flour. When wheat fields in Cologne were infested by sparrows in 1897, this led to the loss of a third of the yield.

To this day, temperature fluctuations, precipitation levels and extreme weather events have an impact on harvests and are becoming more pronounced as a result of climate change. In order to prevent serious crop failures, seeds and cultivation methods, among other things, are continuously being adapted.

Fun fact:

Those affected by crop failures sought explanations in religious and superstitious beliefs. Until the end of the 17th century, natural events that destroyed harvests were interpreted as punishment from God or harmful spells cast by a neighbouring witch.