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Government Assessing Flood Damage to Armenian Agriculture  
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Last week's heavy floods have inflicted substantial damage on Armenia's struggling agriculture and may prompt its government to ask for urgent relief aid from abroad, officials said on Tuesday.

According to the government's emergencies department, more than 60 villages across the country were submerged by overflowing rivers that disrupted public utilities, destroyed spring crops and killed farm livestock in some areas.

"Most of the damage was caused to agricultural land," said Sergei Mkhitarian, a senior department official. "Seeds stashed by farmers for the spring sowing have been washed away. The villages are in a very difficult situation."

Mkhitarian said that although floodwaters have receded since Sunday, five villages in the southern Ararat region remain inundated and power supplies have not yet been fully restored to the mountainous Aragatsotn province northwest of Yerevan. The floods have also damaged several rural bridges, he added.

The disaster resulted from last Thursday's drastic spring warming that caused air temperatures to shoot up by as much as 20 degrees Centigrade. An ensuing massive thaw of snow on mountain slopes swelled the country's main rivers.

The government said inter-ministerial commissions have been formed to count the cost of the flooding in the affected regions. President Robert Kocharian instructed the government on Tuesday to promptly restore the damaged infrastructure and ascertain the amount of compensation to be paid to those hit hard by the calamity.

Mkhitarian said the overall damage is "very big," suggesting that the government will have to seek assistance from international aid agencies and foreign governments.