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WEATHER & CROP NEWS

Week ending December 31, 2000

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**FLORIDA
AGRICULTURE**



WEATHER SUMMARY: Several Peninsula localities experienced near freezing temperatures during the week of December 24 through 30. Immokalee recorded a low of about 36 degrees on at least one day while Homestead recorded at least one low at 44 degrees. Ft. Pierce reported at least one low at 37. Lows for the week averaged in the 30s at Jacksonville, Pensacola, and Tallahassee; in the 40s at Daytona Beach, Orlando, and Tampa; and in the 60s at Miami and West Palm Beach. Highs averaged in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Rainfall ranged from about a quarter inch to an inch and a half with nearly all areas receiving some precipitation. However, drought conditions still exist in several localities. Temperatures plunged to below freezing on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day with Immokalee recording lows at 31 and 26, respectively. Homestead reported lows at about 36 degrees for December 31 and January 1; Hastings, 25 and 24, respectively; Pierson, 25 and 23; Bradenton, 30 and 26; Ona, 28 and 26; Ft. Pierce, about 30 on both days; and Dover, 27 and 28. The Everglades region experienced pockets of cold reportedly at 24 to 28 degrees. Lake Placid temperatures fell into the low 20s.

FIELD CROPS: Topsoil moisture is mostly adequate in the Panhandle. Throughout the Peninsula it is very short to short with scattered areas of adequate moisture. Freezing temperatures in the north are slowing the growth of temporary pasture and small grains. The Peninsula winter pastures are under drought stress. Sugarcane harvest is making good progress. Sugarcane was damaged by freezing temperatures on December 31 and January 1. The extent of the damage is not known at this time.

Moisture Rating	Topsoil		Subsoil	
	Last week	This week	Last week	This week
	Percent			
Very short	25	19	23	27
Short	58	61	69	64
Adequate	17	20	8	9
Surplus	0	0	0	0

LIVESTOCK AND PASTURES: Statewide, the pasture condition is very poor to fair and cattle condition is mostly fair. In the Panhandle, winter forage is poor due to cold and frost. Ranchers are feeding hay where available. Hay supplies are being depleted. Cold and frost are stressing forage and cattle. Ponds and lakes are dry. In the north counties, the permanent pasture condition is poor due to drought, cold and frost. The cool season forage condition is fair. In the central area, available forage is limited and the condition is poor. In the west central counties, the pasture condition is poor to fair. The pasture has been hurt by hard freeze. In the southwest area, the pasture condition is poor to fair due to drought. Tropical soda apple has decreased the pasture condition. Water supplies are still very low.

Condition	Range		Cattle	
	Last week	This week	Last week	This week
	Percent			
Very poor	15	10	0	0
Poor	55	55	15	5
Fair	25	35	75	85
Good	5	0	10	10
Excellent	0	0	0	0

CITRUS: The much needed rains finally arrived on Thursday, December 28. All areas of the citrus belt received varying amounts of

the daylong soaking. However, most groves got less than one inch. It will take a lot more rain to break the current drought. Freezing temperatures the morning of December 31, were generally in the upper 20s in the coldest areas. Normal cold locations had a few readings below the 28 degree mark, but most of the fruit in those areas had already been harvested before the cold arrived. Generally, temperatures were not low enough to cause significant damage to trees and the remaining crops. Harvesting crews were very active all week moving early and midseason oranges to the processors. Most of the larger juice plants are running around the clock and a few started limiting the loads delivered by the field crews. Most fresh fruit packing houses are now very busy following their Christmas break.

Caretakers are still cutting cover crops prior to harvesting for fire protection. Hedging and topping continue in some coastal and southern harvested groves. Burning permits are being limited due to the current drought conditions. Some resets are being planted in the warmer locations.

Estimated boxes harvested week ended

Crop	Dec 17	Dec 24	Dec 31
Navel oranges	413,000	227,000	69,000
Early & Mid oranges			
Including Ambersweet	7,074,000	7,343,000	6,118,000
All grapefruit	903,000	982,000	545,000
Tangerines	266,000	242,000	124,000
Honey Tangerines	3,000	5,000	17,000
Tangelos	148,000	92,000	101,000

VEGETABLES: Crops around Immokalee and in the Everglades suffered significant damage from the cold temperatures. Strong winds that accompanied the cold tossed crops in nearly all southern Peninsula regions. Most East Coast growers used freeze covers to protect some acreage from the low temperatures. Plant City and Floral City strawberry growers continued using overhead irrigation as protection for the cold temperatures. The expected volume of vegetables available over the next few weeks is down significantly due to freeze loss. Vegetables available include snap beans, tomatoes, squash, eggplant, sweet corn, peppers, cucumbers, endive, escarole, lettuce, and radishes.

SNAP BEANS: Dade--Strong winds caused some leaf burn with recovery expected. Some growers ran irrigation to protect acreage from the cold. Planting and harvesting were active prior to the holiday. Southwest--Strong winds and cold temperatures caused some damage to the tops of plants with recovery expected. Planting and harvesting continued prior to the holiday. East Coast--Cold temperatures continue to slow plant growth and bean development. West Central--Harvesting is finished. Everglades--Acreage was significantly damaged by the cold.

CABBAGE: Dade--Cabbage harvest should start next week. Quality looks good and yields should be normal. Growers are expecting a good supply for the rest of winter as weekly plantings are cut. West Central--Crop condition is fair to good. Planting is steady. Growth and development are normal. Harvest is starting. Hastings--Growers are actively planting cabbage. Crop is in good condition. Growth and development are normal. Growers are actively harvesting cabbage. Zellwood--Harvest is active. The crop is in good condition.

SWEET CORN: Dade--The cold caused very little damage to the crop. Picking started with good quality available. Supply is light but is expected to increase over the next ten to fourteen days. Everglades--Producers expect heavy losses in older fields due to the cold temperatures. Young plants will recover. Growers are replanting for spring

In cooperation with the Florida Cooperative Extension Service whose county directors participate in supplying field information.

crop harvest. East Coast--The crop came through the cold with very little damage.

CUCUMBERS, Fresh Market: This report does not include information on any damage that may have occurred on December 31 and January 1 from the freezing temperatures. West Central--Harvest is complete for the fall season. East Coast--Crop is in fair condition. Strong winds, accompanying cool temperatures slowed plant growth and fruit development. Pollination is slowed. Some vine damage and plants are showing dehydration. Harvested volume is moderate. Picking supper selects, selects, and cartons. Quality and collar are good. Limited acreage is protected by freeze covers. Southwest--Planting is light. Crop condition is fair to good. Growth and development are slow. Harvest is steady and fruit quality and sizes are fair to good.

PICKLES: West Central--Harvest is complete. Zellwood--Harvest is complete. Dade--Pickles look good. Pickles harvested are of good quality and yield.

EGGPLANT: Southwest--Damages from the cold are currently being assessed. East Coast--Producers put freeze covers over some acreage for protection. Growers cut a very light volume prior to the holiday. Quality and color were good with fancy grades available. Dade--Strong winds scarred some fruit. However, cold temperatures caused no significant damage. Cutting continued prior to the holiday with good quality available.

ENDIVE/ESCAROLE: Everglades--Strong winds and cold temperatures significantly affected plants. Growers are salvage harvesting. Quality is down.

LETTUCE: Everglades, Lake Placid--Strong winds and cold temperatures significantly affected plants. Producers are making salvage harvests with quality reduced.

OKRA: Dade--The cold temperatures significantly affected the quality of the crop. Recovery is expected over the next ten days to two weeks. Producers finished harvesting most acreage with only a limited acreage currently producing.

BELL PEPPERS: Southwest--The cold temperatures caused leaf burn on the tops of plants. Recovery is expected. Planting and picking continued prior to the holiday. East Coast--Growers used freeze covers on most acreage to protect the crop from the cold. Planting and picking were active before the holiday. West Central--Picking is done.

HOT PEPPERS: Southwest--Damage from the cold temperatures is

currently being assessed. Planting and harvesting continued before the holiday. East Coast--Picking of a light volume continued prior to the holiday.

POTATOES: Southwest--Strong winds tossed tops of plants with some damage reported. Planting is winding down. West Central--Crop damage from the cold temperatures and strong winds is currently being assessed. Planting is nearing the end.

RADISHES: Everglades, Lake Placid--Young plants suffered heavy damage from the cold. Damage to tops in older fields is causing harvesting problems. Producers are replanting for February harvesting. Digging continued prior to the holiday.

SQUASH: Dade--Strong winds burned the tops of plants with recovery expected. Planting and picking were active before the holiday. Southwest--The cold weather destroyed most acreage. Planting and harvesting continued prior to the holiday. East Coast--Harvesting of a light volume was active prior to the holiday. Wind and cold temperature damage is currently being assessed.

STRAWBERRIES: Plant City, Floral City--Producers continued overhead irrigation to protect plants and immature fruit from the cold. Water and cold caused some fruit loss. Volume is limited for the next week but is expected to start increasing seasonally when warmer weather returns. Palmetto-Ruskin--Cold weather is slowing the ripening of berries. Damage from the cold is currently being assessed. Dade--U-Pic harvesting is slow. Quality is good. Cold temperatures are slowing fruit maturation.

TOMATOES: Dade--The cold weather caused very little damage to the crop. Planting is active. Harvesting is slowly increasing. Quality is good. Southwest--The cold temperatures burned the tops of plants. Some fruit was frozen solid. Actual loss is currently being assessed. East Coast--Strong winds and cold temperatures caused some light foliage burns. Plant growth and fruit development are slow due to the cool weather. Transplanting slowed. Harvesting of a moderate volume was active before the holiday. Quality was good. Palmetto-Ruskin--Picking is virtually over. Planting of spring acreage is expected to start over the next two weeks.

CHERRY TOMATOES: Southwest--Damage from the cold is currently being assessed. Planting and harvesting continued prior to the holiday. Palmetto-Ruskin--Harvesting is virtually finished.

PLUM TOMATOES: Southwest--Damage from the cold weather is currently being assessed. Planting and picking were active before the holiday. Palmetto-Ruskin--Picking is virtually done.

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