

2004 CROP WEATHER SUMMARY

JANUARY-APRIL: Arctic cold temperatures blasted the six-state region during January. During the first two weeks of the year, New Englanders experienced some of the coldest weather in decades. Snow fell in some areas at the end of the month. Seasonal temperatures prevailed during the month of February. Maple sugar producers were busy preparing for the upcoming season. Cool nights and warm days made ideal conditions for tapping. Temperatures were mild early in March, then dipped to slightly below normal later in the month. Maple sugaring season started off slow in Connecticut, Massachusetts and New Hampshire due to warm weather, but picked up as temperatures cooled off. Northern Maine and Vermont Maple producers were just starting to tap. Seasonal temperatures and showers prevailed throughout most of April in New England hindering planting in some areas. Sugar producers reported having an excellent season and maple syrup sales were brisk.

MAY: May began with warm temperatures, which helped fields to dry out from all the precipitation received during April. The warm temperatures soon gave way to cool, breezy, damp conditions, which prevailed the rest of the month. Soil moisture levels were rated adequate to surplus all month long. Similar to last year, hay growers were optimistic about this year's crop due to the cool, wet conditions in spring providing optimal growing conditions. Potato growers in Maine patiently waited for soils to warm up to begin their planting season. As of June 1, potato planting progress in Maine was ahead of the five-year average by 15 percentage points. Likewise, potato growers in Massachusetts made great advancements in planting. Potato planting progress was in line with the five-year average at 95 percent. Rhode Island potato growers had planted 85 percent of their crop by this same date. Shade tobacco transplanting reached 90 percent complete by the end of the month, as broadleaf growers prepared to set out seedlings. Field and sweet corn planting were ahead of normal schedules, at 75 and 65 percent respectively. Most tree fruit crops had reached petal fall stage and were rated in fair to good condition. Maine wild blueberry growers were kept active during the month as they sprayed fungicides to protect against Mummyberry disease. Cranberries in Massachusetts were in bud stage by month's end, and growers applied insecticides for fireworm and cranberry weevil.

JUNE: The cool, wet conditions that were prevalent in May, continued into June and hindered planting in most locations. By mid-June, dry, sunny weather allowed New England farmers the opportunity to complete the planting of most major crops. First cut hay moved into high gear with the warmer temperatures as farmers anticipated good crop yields. Second cutting was underway by the end of the month and was reported in better condition than the first cutting. Potatoes were fully emerged in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and were nearly all emerged in Maine by the end of June. The condition of the potato crop ranged from good to excellent in all states. By late June, Maine oats and barley crops were fully emerged and were in good or excellent condition. The transplanting of shade tobacco was completed and growers throughout the region were still active setting out the last of the broadleaf tobacco plants. The conditions of tree fruit crops remained in good or fair condition. Winter damage was seen in some apple and peach orchards. Forty-five percent of New England's strawberry crop had been harvested as of late June, with the crop rated as good to fair in most areas. Massachusetts' cranberry crop had reached petal fall and was reported in fair to good condition. Maine's wild blueberry crop was rated in poor to fair condition as of late June.

JULY: Warm, sunny temperatures at the end of June continued into July. The warm temperatures were ideal for hay making, beneficial to crop growth and development, and allowed farmers to make good progress toward final stages of vegetable planting. Most crops were planted and fully emerged by the beginning of the month. First cut hay harvest was winding down with the crop in good to fair condition. The hot and humid weather was beneficial for field corn growth as early fields began to tassel. The condition of the corn crop remained in good to fair condition. Potato harvest in Massachusetts began in late July, but Rhode Island growers were still gearing up for harvest. Oats and

barley in Maine were rated in excellent to good condition. Shade tobacco harvest was underway with 10 percent of the crop harvested. New England's fruit crop condition ranged from good to fair in July. Massachusetts cranberries were nearly out of bloom and fruit set was reported as good. Growers irrigated throughout the region to relieve dry conditions.

AUGUST: Warm, humid and rainy weather dominated the month, with conditions turning cooler and drier. Shower activity and lack of sunshine provided unfavorable growing conditions for many field crops. The prolonged lack of sunshine with cooler than normal evening temperatures in August slowed field corn maturity, and harvest was expected to be delayed at some locations. Maine small grain harvest was initially delayed due to wet conditions, but dry weather the last week of August moved harvest into high gear. Oats harvest advanced to 20 percent and barley was 40 percent harvested; both crops were about a week behind schedule. Massachusetts and Rhode Island potato harvest kept pace with the five-year average, and crop conditions were good to excellent. Late blight was discovered in Aroostook County, Maine, and growers intensified their spraying efforts during August to combat the disease. Potato crop conditions were rated good to fair with growers readying machinery and desiccating vines in preparation for harvest. Both shade and broadleaf tobacco harvest trailed last year and the five-year average. Blue mold was identified in the Connecticut River Valley on August 3, and growers were on a tight protective spray schedule. Rain and a lack of consecutive dry days hampered dry hay harvest in New England this summer. Orchardists harvested peaches and had just begun early apple and pear harvest. Maine wild blueberry harvest was near completion while summer rains promoted above average fruit size. Massachusetts cranberry crop condition continued to improve with cool temperatures enhancing fruit color. Hot, humid conditions with plenty of moisture provided favorable growing conditions for sweet corn, with crop ratings at good or excellent at most locations. Summer vegetable harvest was active, with some pumpkins and winter squash picked.

SEPTEMBER: New England saw quite a bit of rain in September. Soil moisture levels were mostly adequate to surplus all month due to the remnants from hurricanes Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne. The abundance of rain caused riverbanks to overflow in some locations as well as flooding of fields in other areas. Overall, temperatures during the month were seasonable and farm operators had plenty of opportunity to harvest fall crops between the showers. Small grain harvest in Maine progressed slowly due to saturated fields though the crop remained in fair to good condition. Haying activities continued as weather permitted, but the quality of the crop was diminished in some areas. By the end of the month, second crop hay harvest was near completion while third crop hay was 70 percent finished. Field corn harvest was in full swing; Maine potato crop yields were reported as excellent; peach harvest was winding down while apple harvest was well underway. Cranberry specialist reported a quality crop had been harvested with good color. Consumer demand for vegetables remained high at markets and farm stands. Sweet corn harvest was near completion with just five percent of the crop left for harvest.

OCTOBER - DECEMBER: A frigid air mass hit the six-state region during the first week of October bringing an end to the growing season in most locations. Despite the cooler evening temperatures, daytime conditions were sunny and dry allowing operators a chance to finish up harvest activities. Growers were busy getting in the last of the hay as the cold temperatures slowed growth on most fields. Silage growers were busy chopping and reported having a quality crop in storage with good tonnage. Only one percent of potatoes remained for harvest. Orchardists finished picking peaches by the end of the first week of October and by month's end only late mature varieties of apples remained to be harvest along with the last of the pears. Cranberry harvest was in full swing though some growers expressed disappointment with berry size but were still pleased with the color and quality of the crop.