# 2001 CROP WEATHER SUMMARY

**JANUARY-APRIL:** The new year started with snow and cold temperatures. Much of New England was blanketed with snow the entire month of January. Maple sugaring season got off to a slow start compared to previous years due to the deep snow pack. The cold temperatures and snow limited farming activities to nursery/greenhouse work, tending livestock, and moving apples and potatoes out of storage. Farmers also stayed busy repairing machinery, and bringing tractors, trucks, and implements out of storage in preparation for the spring planting season.

**MAY:** Dry weather conditions prevailed during the month, providing farmers with plenty of opportunity to get crops in the ground, but supplying insufficient moisture for crop growth. As of mid-May, planting progress for most crops was ahead of normal. Hot and dry conditions early in the month were followed by unseasonably cool, dry conditions, and growers were forced to irrigate and protect from frost at many locations. Hardest hit by near-drought conditions were the southernmost States, where crop condition ratings hovered between fair and good for most of the month. Even though rains came to most areas of the six-State region by the end of May, the Northern States and most parts of southern New England still had below-average monthly precipitation. Although the extended dry weather provided good pollinating conditions for most fruit tree crops, a severe frost hit the second week in May when many trees from southern New Hamphsire and south were in full bloom. Tree fruit crops, particularly in the southern New England States, suffered heavy losses.

**JUNE:** Warm, sunny weather and timely rains during the month gave farmers ample opportunity to get most crops in the ground early and provided adequate moisture and sunshine for crop growth. The plentiful rainfall allowed crops in the southernmost States to recover somewhat from unsatisfactory cool, dry conditions in May. As of mid-June, most major crops in New England were planted, and progress was ahead of normal. First crop hay yields were lower than usual, due to stunted crop growth attributed to May's lack of sufficient moisture.

**JULY:** The month of July started out with hot, humid weather which accelerated crop growth and allowed farmers to work in the fields. Second crop hay growth was excellent early in the month in response to timely rains, and yields were expected to be better than the short first cut. A severe armyworm infestation occurred mid-month, however, which brought significant damage to the second crop hay. At some locations entire fields were destroyed. Moisture levels were variable throughout the region during July, and most crops were in need of rain by the end of the month. Silage corn was rated in good to excellent condition, spared from severe armyworm destruction, but in need of moisture. Potato harvest was just getting underway the last week of July in Maine, ahead of schedule due to early planting and excellent growing conditions. The harvest of both shade and broadleaf tobacco was gaining momentum by the end of the month. A severe hail storm hit mid-month in Massachusetts, completely destroyed broadleaf acreage at some locations. Throughout July, tree fruit crops in Connecticut and Rhode Island continued to recover from a severe frost which hit at peak bloom in mid-May; yields in most areas were expected to be down.

**AUGUST:** Drought conditions prevailed in New England throughout the month of August. The lack of moisture caused damage to hay crops, which had already been ravaged by severe armyworm infestations in July. Farmers cut their second hay crops quickly to stay ahead of the armyworm attack in July and as a result, the harvest remained ahead of normal throughout August. Silage corn harvest was just getting underway at month's end, and the crop was greatly in need of moisture. Maine potato growers were irrigating if equipment was available to combat drought conditions; yields were expected to be lighter than normal, but no problems from disease had surfaced as growers prepared for harvest. The harvest of both shade and broadleaf tobacco was nearly complete by the end of the month. Some late planted shade and broadleaf tobacco fields were discovered to be infected with blue mold as the last of the crop was picked, and acreage was destroyed at some locations. Maine's wild blueberry harvest neared completion by month's end; the crop suffered great losses from the ill-timed dry weather and yields were much lower than expected on non-irrigated fields.

**SEPTEMBER:** Dry conditions that began in mid-July persisted into early September. The extended period without rain reduced yields on most crops and diminished ground water supplies at many locations. Regrowth of third crop hay was minimal due to lack of moisture, and by month's end, hay crops were rated as fair or poor across New England. Corn yields were reduced significantly by drought conditions and July's armyworm attack. Rains arrived later in September, but came too late to help corn crop growth in the southernmost states. Potato harvest had advanced past the halfway mark in Maine by the end of September, roughly on schedule with last year and normal. Yields in Maine were variable depending on irrigation availability or where showers fell during the summer, but quality remained good or excellent at most locations. Tree fruit harvest was active during the month; apple and pear progress had passed the midway point by the last week in September, and peach harvest was complete by the end of the month. Fruit size was below average due to the prolonged dry conditions. The last of Maine's 2001 wild blueberries were harvested the first few days in September; yields were much lower than expected on non-irrigated fields. As of September 30, temperatures had dipped below freezing in northern and low lying areas, but most of southern New England still awaited the first killing frost.

**OCTOBER:** Cool fall temperatures set-in during the first week of October and a hard frost hit by the second week. The frost finished off most of what was left of the late season vegetable crops. The first snow fall of the season occurred by mid-month in higher elevations. Maine barley and oat harvest were both completed by the second week. Around the same time, sweet corn harvest came to an end, right on schedule with the previous year and normal. Potato harvest in Maine and Rhode Island was nearly complete by mid-month, as was the cut of second crop hay. Massachusetts potato harvest was complete by month's end, along with the harvest of silage corn and pears. Late maturing apple varieties were completely harvested by the end of October, and both color and sweetness were reported improved by the cool temperatures which occurred early in the month. The third crop of hay continued to be cut as November approached. By month's end, most crops were harvested and farmers kept busy by getting their fields and equipment ready for the winter months.

**NOVEMBER:** November began with unseasonably warm weather, which allowed farmers to complete the cutting of third crop hay. Harvest of most crops was completed by mid-month as snow fell in higher elevations across New England. Shortly thereafter, unusually warm weather once again moved into the area and remained until month's end, allowing farmers to wrap up any last-minute field preparations. Massachusetts cranberry growers finished harvesting their crops by late November and preliminary indications show the quality of this year's crop to be below average, due to insect problems and fruit rot.

**DECEMBER:** Unseasonably warm weather persisted throughout the first part of December. After mid-month, cooler temperatures and snow arrived in time for the holiday season. Drought conditions beginning in July left water levels low in the northeast. Precipitation during December was welcomed, but was not significant enough to make great improvements to water levels throughout most of the area.