

1998 CROP-WEATHER SUMMARY

MAY: After a mild winter, temperatures continued above normal for the month. Most May rainfall occurred during the week ending May 11. Farmers took advantage of warm spring weather to make significant progress in their fieldwork; by month's end potato, corn, small grains, and tobacco plantings were one to two weeks ahead of schedule. In Maine, potatoes were 95 percent planted, compared with 30 percent in 1997 and 70 percent normal. Warm conditions also allowed the first cutting of dry hay to progress ahead of last year and the five year average. Conditions were favorable for early season vegetable harvest and warm season variety plantings. A streak of windy and rainy days at peak bloom led to poor pollination conditions for the apple crop in many orchards. Heaviest damage was seen in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island orchards, and light fruit set was expected. Other fruits were reported in good condition.

JUNE: Temperatures during June were extremely varied-ranging from 4 degrees below normal in early June to five degrees above normal by month's end. Heavy rains hit mid-month and delayed normal June agricultural activities. Many low-lying areas of New England were hit with severe storms and flooding, which forced farmers to replant vegetable crops and corn that had been washed out during the heavy rains. It also left its mark on the first cut of dry hay, leaving it at 60% harvested at month's end, slightly below last year's and the five-year average. The wet weather was also ideal for many types of insect and fungal infestations. Blue mold was identified in Connecticut River Valley tobacco fields mid-month. The weather also caused the pick-your-own strawberry operations to begin 1-2 weeks ahead of schedule; but also to finish up earlier than normal. By the last week of June, however, many areas began to dry out and farmers could get into the fields. Farmer's markets opened up to accommodate the harvest of the early season vegetables.

JULY: New England agriculture made significant progress in the month of July. The heavy June rains had subsided by the first week of the month, allowing the drier weather to make its way into the area. The temperatures this month ranged from 4 degrees below normal in the beginning of July to 5 degrees above normal toward the month's end. Farmers had harvested 40% of second cut hay by month's end; slightly above the five year average of 30%. The mild, dry weather was also ideal for deterring insects and disease. Although there was late blight found in Maine potato fields, the dry weather kept it under control with the help of a 5-day spray schedule. The threat of blue mold in the Connecticut River Valley caused tobacco farmers to harvest their crop extremely early. By month's end, the tobacco harvest had advanced to 50% for shade, far surpassing the 5 year average of 15%, and broadleaf was 15% picked compared with the <5% normally in by the end of the month. Farmers' markets were busy all month selling a variety of fruits and vegetables such as lettuce, peas, summer squash, sweet corn, cucumbers, blueberries, and raspberries.

AUGUST: The dry weather experienced in July continued through the month of August. Although some areas received showers during August, the majority of the stations reported receiving below normal precipitation levels during the month. By month's end over 75% of the pastures were rated in fair condition or better. Similar to last August, tobacco farmers had harvested the crop ahead of the five-year average in an attempt to reduce losses from blue mold disease. By the end of the month, all shade tobacco in the Connecticut River Valley was harvested and approximately 95% of the broadleaf tobacco was harvested. Corn silage harvest was just starting at month's end. In some areas field corn quality suffered due to excessive rains in June or the lack of rain in August. Fall potato harvest in southern New England was active during the

month, while northern New England producers had begun top killing potato vines. The small grain crop harvest in Maine had just passed the halfway mark by month's end, and was reported in good to fair condition. Orchardists were busy with peach harvest and early apple and pear harvest during August. Cranberries responded well to adequate heat and moisture, and growers are expecting a high yielding crop. By the last week of August, nearly all the wild blueberries in Maine were harvested. Because of the lack of moisture, the 1998 wild blueberry crop did not meet initial expectations. Highbush blueberries were approximately 95% harvested by month's end. Vegetable harvest was in full swing in August, and direct marketers reported brisk sales during the entire month. Extended dry conditions forced vegetable operations to irrigate where equipment was available.

SEPTEMBER: The dry conditions experienced in July and August continued into the month of September. Scattered showers that fell across New England during the last full week of September were too late to benefit many of the vegetable and field crops. Many locations received their first frost of the fall season during the latter half of the month. The dry conditions allowed farmers to harvest approximately 50% of the field corn during the month. The condition of this year's field corn crop varied depending on location. The excessive rain received during June, along with prolonged dry conditions of July and August, adversely impaired the quality of some field corn. By the middle of the month, tobacco farmers in the Connecticut River Valley had harvested nearly all the broadleaf tobacco. In Maine, farmers were busy combining oats and barley. During the entire month, potato farmers in Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island were harvesting this year's crop. Similar to the field corn, vegetable growing conditions varied from field to field. The drier conditions assisted the harvesting of many late season vegetables during the month. Throughout the month, reports indicated an excellent year for farm stands marketing vegetables. By the end of the month nearly all the sweet corn was picked. Orchardists made good progress harvesting this year's apple, peach and pear crops, and by the end of the month all peaches were harvested. In Massachusetts, the cranberry harvest was just getting underway. With less than a quarter of the cranberry crop harvested, the condition of this year's crop was rated as good to excellent.

OCTOBER: During the first full week of October, rain showers fell across most of New England. These rains provided much needed moisture after the dry summer conditions through September. However, in many areas, the increased moisture was too late to help crop conditions. The rains slowed the harvest of potatoes and field corn. At the beginning of October, field corn harvest across all six states was just past the halfway point and the potato harvest in Maine, Massachusetts and Rhode Island was about three-quarters complete. Orchardists made good progress with the apple and pear harvest; by October 25, 95 percent of the apples and 99 percent of the pears were picked. The 1998 cranberry harvest started out a bit later than 1997 and the 5-year average because the growers were waiting for better color. However, by the end of the month, the cranberry harvest was at the 5-year average with 90 percent harvested by October 25. Vegetable growers continued to harvest late season varieties at the beginning of the month. By mid-month, most areas of New England received frost which put an end to the 1998 vegetable season. Pumpkins and squash were being marketed at many pick-your-own and roadside stands. Overall, direct marketers reported good sales for the month of October. Rains received during the Columbus Day weekend did slow sales at some pick-your-own operations.

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MAY: Warm and dry weather conditions prevailed during the month of May, continuing the April dry spell where Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine all received less than a third of their normal precipitation total. Farmers were able to work their fields early and spring activities progressed quickly. By the end of May, potato and small grain planting was virtually complete, and field corn planting was about one week ahead of the 5-year average. Favorable pollination conditions during the month led to an average to above average fruit set for apples. Emerged sweet corn and other vegetables looked good, but at month's end, all crops needed more rain.

JUNE: The weather during the month of June was hot and dry for most of New England. As the month came to a close, most areas around New England had received below normal amounts of precipitation. The number of growing-degree-days (Base 60F) were way ahead of normal for nearly all reporting stations. The warm sunny weather, when combined with irrigation, advanced crop development and retarded disease and insect pressures. The condition of the first cutting of hay was good to fair but, many farmers were concerned about the follow-on cutting because of the poor growth due to the lack of moisture. Potatoes were planted earlier than normal. This year's shade tobacco crop was also planted ahead of last year's crop and the five year average. The warm sunny weather provided good conditions for pollinating the cranberry crop in Massachusetts, but the warm dry weather started drying the bogs towards the end of the month. There were a few reports of sweet corn being harvested the last week of June. Some scattered thunderstorms moved across the region the last week of June. They provided relief in a few locations, but many crops still needed moisture.

JULY: After hot dry conditions persisted throughout most of July, almost all 89 weather stations in New England reported below normal amounts of precipitation for the 4-week cumulative total. Although there were a few passing thunderstorms during the month, most areas were in still need of moisture, especially southern New England. With extreme heat and lack of rain, farmers stayed busy irrigating crops whenever possible. Because of the near constant irrigation, some ponds were starting to dry up as the month came to a close. The first cutting of hay was reported in good to fair condition, but follow-on cuttings were hurt due to lack of moisture. In some locations second and third cuttings were not possible because of the long dry spell. Corn fields that were irrigated grew well under the hot July sun. But where irrigation was not available or where no rain showers fell, the corn was stunted and the ears did not fill out. In the middle of the month many tobacco farmers in the Connecticut River Valley started harvesting their crop. There were a few reports of blue mold in this year's crop but no widespread outbreaks were reported. As the month came to a close, the tobacco crop was reported in good condition. The size of some fruit was average to below average. A few vegetable farmers were harvesting sweet corn the first week of July. In many areas there were not quite as many problems with pests, which may have been partly due to the hot and dry weather.

AUGUST: The hot dry weather continued to take its toll on many crops across New England. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman declared the entire states of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts agricultural disaster areas along with the three southernmost counties in New Hampshire (Cheshire, Hillsborough and Rockingham) and all counties in Maine except for Aroostook & Piscataquis. Anyone with irrigation equipment was busy applying water but some sources were depleted. Over half the pastures were in poor to very poor condition by month's end. Some dairymen were

forced to use this year's cutting of hay to help feed their livestock. Scattered rain showers fell in the latter half of the month, promoted enough regrowth in some hay fields to make a second or third cut possible. The hot summer did not seem to affect the condition of the apple crop, as much as the size of the . The peach and pear crops did not seem to handle the heat quite as well as the apple crop. Massachusetts' cranberry bogs also benefitted from rain showers received in the second half of the month. Blueberry harvest was nearly finished at the end of August. with both the highbush and Maine's wild blueberry crops reported to be in good to fair condition. During the last week of the month, many farmers were starting to harvest silage corn, some of which had been stunted due to the lack of moisture. The oat and barley harvest was nearing completion in Maine, while the potato harvest was about 50% completed in southern New England and just getting underway in Maine. Compared to previous years, there were not as many reports of blue mold in this year's Shade and Broadleaf tobacco crop.

SEPTEMBER: The first significant amount of rainfall for the 1999 growing season was received across most of New England in mid-September. Most of this rainfall was from the remnants of Hurricane Floyd. Despite the rain, moisture was received too late in the growing season to aid most crops, although it helped restore pond, reservoir, and groundwater levels. By the end of the month, all 67 New England counties had been declared USDA agricultural disaster areas or were contiguous to a county that was declared an agricultural disaster area. Maine wild blueberries were all harvested in early September and highbush were done by month's end. Cranberry harvest began then end of August. The summer's long dry spell reduced the size of the fruit in many apple, peach, and pear orchards. The condition of the pear crop began the month in good to fair condition, but as the month progressed, the condition declined to fair to poor. Apples and peaches seemed to withstand the dry summer a little bit better. At the end of the month, the apple crop was reported in good condition while the peach crop was reported in fair condition. The rains did help the condition of many pastures and hay fields. Farmers were hoping to get one final cutting of hay before the season came to an end. The corn silage harvest was slowed slightly during the middle of the month due to wet fields. Tobacco farmers in the Connecticut River valley completed harvesting their crop by the end of the month. There were not as many "blue mold" reports this season than in years past. In late September, the potato harvest in Aroostook County, Maine was behind last year and five year averages because field were too wet for harvesting equipment.

OCTOBER: Maine's potato harvest had reached the halfway point in early October when wet conditions returned, prohibiting field entry at many locations. Farmers struggled with wet conditions for the remainder of the month, and were forced to leave some potato acreage unharvested. Although field corn harvest was also slowed by excessively muddy fields, summer long drought conditions had forced early maturity, and the bulk of the crop was harvested ahead of schedule. Many locations received frost the first full week of the month. The frost brought the vegetable harvest season to a close at most areas. Rains during September aided pasture and field growth, therefore some farmers were able to get a final cutting of hay although not as many cuttings as usual. Fruit size was generally average to below average at many locations because of the dry year, however quality was excellent for the same reason. Maine's wild blueberry farmers were active with field mowing and burning. Cranberry harvest neared completion and was rated in good to excellent condition.