Freezing Temperatures Affect Florida

Fact Sheet

Event date: Freeze of 1980-1981

Figure 1. (Left) Icicles on citrus trees. (Right) Little girl examining frozen citrus trees.

Summary of event: The winter of 1980-1981 experienced severe freeze conditions for many locations in Florida. Normally temperate climates turned frigid. Pinellas Park experienced temperatures of 24°F (-4.4°C), while Tampa experienced 22°F (-5.5°C). The estimated loss of citrus crops was around 30 million boxes, and each box yielded a below average amount of juice. Other crops increased in price, with vegetables such as tomatoes doubling their cost.
A rare Dixie blizzard paralyzed East Coast cities with knee-deep snow and a record freeze hit Florida in March storms that have left at least 36 people dead. The coldest blast of arctic air ever to hit Florida so late in the year sent thermometers to record lows from Pensacola to Key West. Snow flurries fell as far south as Tampa and Ocala in Central Florida, the weather service said, and some residents reported seeing snowflakes as far south as Fort Lauderdale.

Carl Oultz of the Agriculture Department's Crop Reporting Service said it appeared some of the most serious damage to vegetable crops occurred in the central and north-central growing areas of the state. He said the impact would be greater on spring vegetable crops four or five weeks from now than on the winter vegetable crops in southern Florida.

Ice coated the unharvested early and mid-winter orange crop, amounting to 15 to 20 million boxes. And rapidly maturing Valencia oranges, about 55 million 90-pound boxes ready to be harvested for frozen concentrated orange juice. Froze on the trees in 20-degree temperatures Sunday and Monday.

“We are in serious trouble,” said Herb Riley of the Florida Fruit Inspection Service. "It's just not supposed to happen in March," he said. The National Weather Service in Ruskin said the freeze is the latest and coldest to hit Florida since March 4, 1948. Some areas, including Tampa, recorded the lowest temperatures for the day since the weather service was founded in 1850.

"What wasn't damaged last night will be damaged tonight," said Tom Oswalt of the Polk County Extension Service. He said the freezing temperatures, caused by a polar air mass, do not usually occur this late in the year.

Freeze may force embargo Freeze damages vegetable crops $2-billion Florida citrus business 'in serious trouble' following freeze

Figure 2. Newspaper clippings and various headlines.
Figure 3. Newspaper headlines and pictures indicating severity of the freeze.

Links for more information: [http://www.terrain.org/unsprawl/14/images/hw_freeze.jpg](http://www.terrain.org/unsprawl/14/images/hw_freeze.jpg)