

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.



Rare March freeze paralyzes East Coast

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.

Ice coated the unharvested early and mid-winter orange crop, amounting to 15 to 20 million boxes. And rapidly maturing Valencia oranges, about 85 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 as growers and traders

Carl Ouzts 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.

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

"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, 1943. Some areas, including Tampa, recorded the lowest temperatures for the day since the weather service was founded in 1890.

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Freeze Hurts Orange Crop



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.



FLORIDA LOSSES RISE AS FREEZE CONTINUES

While the weather moderated slightly in parts of the nation's Northeast, the mercury was still far below zero in many areas, and the National Weather Service said that abnormal cold was likely to linger for at least another month. By con-

Winter Vegetables and Up to 20% of Orange Crop Damaged — 5 Cities Set Record Lows

In Florida, record low temperatures were reported for the date by Daytona Beach, 19 degrees; Orlando, 20; Tampa, 29; Fort Myers, 31; and Key West, 47.

Much of South Still Snowed Under; Freeze Hits Citrus Crops in Florida

Tonight, for the second night, the National Weather Service said, freezing weather was expected from northern Florida to the Keys. Early this morning, temperatures dropped to 8 degrees in Tallahassee and to 19 degrees in Jacksonville, where one death was attributed to the cold. It was 27 degrees in Homestead, a rich agricultural area south of Miami.

As for Florida, the National Weather Service said that never had such a cold mass of air swept across the state so late in the winter.

Freeze Nips Florida Oranges but Stocks Are Plentiful; Brazil May Boost Exports

Freeze Damaged Orange Crop



United Press International

Water from sprinklers froze and coated oranges in Rockledge, Fla.

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

Acknowledgements: The Ledger – March 4, 1980, The Milwaukee Sentinel - March 5, 1980, Spokane Daily Chronicle – March 10, 1980.