

2002 CROP WEATHER SUMMARY

JANUARY-APRIL: New England began 2002 with minimal drought relief and water levels slowly depleted. Above normal temperatures persisted throughout January into April. Occasional cold spells hit in March and minor precipitation was received. All 14 counties in Vermont were designated as disaster areas by Secretary of Agriculture Veneman. Maple producers completed production in April, optimistic that drought conditions would not greatly affect their output. Above average temperatures tapered off to cooler weather by April. Frost damage to early fruit and vegetable crops from the cooler temperatures concerned farmers.

MAY: In May, cool, damp weather prevailed, placed planting schedules behind normal, caused delayed bloom in fruit crops, and slowed germination. By mid-May, planting progress for most crops were behind previous year and normal. At many locations, cool conditions forced growers to irrigate to protect from frost. Above average precipitation provided relief to low soil moisture levels. Potato planting progress was at, or ahead of, the five-year average by May 28 in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, while Maine's progress trailed the norm by 10 percentage points. The potato crop was rated as good or better by month's end in all States. Growers actively planted field corn and sweet corn; progress had passed the half-way mark for both by the end of May. Shade tobacco transplanting was 20 percent completed by May 28 and broadleaf growers had begun to set out seedlings. Several hard frosts hit throughout the month and caused localized damage to fruit crops, particularly peaches and pears. Below average temperatures were not conducive to good pollination. Cranberry plants remained in bud stage. Maine's wild blueberry crop development was slightly behind schedule due to delayed bloom.

JUNE: Cool, wet conditions continued. Crop growth slowed due to below normal temperatures; fruit and vegetable crops suffered accordingly. Farmers found it difficult to make dry hay due to the consistent rain and wet fields; most of the first cut was chopped for haylage. By month's end, the second cutting was underway and the second crop reported in better condition. Condition of the potato crop ranged from good to excellent in all States. The condition of apples, peaches, and pears steadily improved and increased growers' hopes that output would not be greatly affected by the poor weather conditions during bloom. Fifty-five percent of New England's strawberry crop had been harvested by late-June; crop conditions rated as fair to good in most areas. Cool, wet conditions earlier in the season caused berries to rot in the field. Massachusetts' cranberry crop approached petal fall in good condition by month's end. Maine's wild blueberry crop rated in good condition as of late June, and growers continued to look for pests and diseases.

JULY: High heat and humidity prevailed into July and accelerated crop growth previously slowed by cool spring conditions. The lack of rain throughout New England forced growers to irrigate. Regrowth for second cut was initially good, however, prolonged dry conditions reduced yields. Second crop harvest was close to the half-way mark by month's end, with third crop cutting getting underway. Silage corn remained in good to fair condition, but the leaves started to curl from lack of moisture. By late-July, potato harvest was underway in Massachusetts, while Rhode Island growers were geared up for harvest. Maine potato growth was excellent. Heat shower activity kept crop ratings high as harvest approached. Potato growing regions in the State remained blight free during July, and spray programs were in full force to prevent the onset of disease. Shade tobacco harvest was underway in the Connecticut River Valley by mid-July, with a good to fair crop

expected. Farmers cut broadleaf tobacco at the end of the month and expected harvest to proceed quickly to get the crop in the sheds disease free. Blue mold was prevalent in the Valley and spray programs were in full force to control its spread. New England apples and peaches remained in good to fair condition; full crop prospects were expected to be reduced by damage from July hail storms and lack of moisture. In Connecticut, pears were rated in very poor condition due to spring frost and hail. Strawberry harvest in New England wrapped up by the end of July. Massachusetts' cranberry growers were forced to irrigate heavily to help berries size.

AUGUST: Dry weather and high heat prevailed in New England for the majority of August. Conditions of the second and third hay crops declined, silage corn leaves curled, and growth was stunted as growers geared up for harvest. No major problems from disease surfaced as Maine potato growers prepared for harvest, but the crop was expected to produce low yields due to lack of moisture during growth. Maine oat and barley harvest was behind normal, but crops were rated in excellent to good condition. Shade and broadleaf tobacco harvest was almost completed by the end of August and rated in good to fair condition; acreage and yield losses were anticipated from a blue mold disease outbreak. Peach harvest was active, while apple and pear harvests gained momentum, with a smaller than average crop expected. Damaged bushes, last year's dry weather, and cool, wet conditions during pollination did not improve matters. Cranberries in Massachusetts struggled from dry conditions. Berries were smaller than average in most locations and farmers held back from irrigating to reserve water and protect berries during the upcoming frost season.

SEPTEMBER: Throughout New England, above normal temperatures prevailed. Rain arrived too late to help most crops. Second crop hay harvest was nearly completed by month's end; growers cut a third crop and had 20 percent left to harvest. Silage corn remained in good to fair condition with harvest at the half-way mark by month's end. Potato harvest, in both Maine and Massachusetts, was behind normal. Maine potato growers reported below average tuber size due to lack of rain. Maine oat and barley harvest was ahead of normal and rated in good to excellent condition. Broadleaf tobacco harvest was completed by mid-month and shade tobacco harvest was wrapped up by month's end. Peach harvest was nearly completed by the end of September. Apple harvest was on schedule, with 60 percent harvested at month's end. Pear condition remained very poor, and half of the crop remained to be harvested. Growers completed the harvest of highbush blueberries by mid-month. Fifteen percent of Massachusetts' cranberries were harvested by the end of the month, berry size was reported as small, and some losses were expected due to damage from fruit rot.

OCTOBER-DECEMBER: Optimum harvest conditions at the start of October gave way to cool, rainy conditions for the remainder of the month. Most crop harvests were completed by early-November. In December, farmers actively dug out from multiple snow storms. Accumulations of more than one foot of snow helped replenish tight water supplies. Farmers tended livestock, sold crops from storage, and tobacco was taken down and bundled for buyer inspection. With milk prices too low, farmers attended meetings and producers tried to increase public awareness of the plight of dairy farmers in New England.

2003 CROP WEATHER SUMMARY

JANUARY-APRIL: Snow storms during January helped replenish water supplies previously short from summer drought. Frigid temperatures persisted into February. Maple producers awaited warmer temperatures, but piercing temperatures and deep snow in areas caused poor conditions for tapping. Temperatures in New England rose above normal during the latter half of March. Warmer days were conducive to maple sap flow and many maple producers tapped trees. Below average temperatures prevailed throughout most of April, pushing the spring planting season behind normal. Maple sugaring activities were mostly completed by mid-month; the maple industry anticipated reduced production due to extreme temperature changes during the spring. Higher than normal levels of precipitation at month's end put a damper on fieldwork.

MAY: Unseasonably cool temperatures dominated the month and planting schedules in New England fell behind by as much as three weeks. Low soil temperatures in early May slowed germination of crops already in the ground. The below average temperatures raised the threat of frost and caused farmers to irrigate to protect certain crops. Hay growers were optimistic about this year's crop due to the cool, wet conditions in spring that provided optimal growing conditions. Potato planting progress was close to the five-year average as of the end of May in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Maine potato planting progress was 20 percentage points below the five-year average. Shade tobacco transplanting reached 45 percent completed by the end of May, as broadleaf growers prepared to set out seedlings. Field and sweet corn plantings were behind normal schedules. Most tree fruit crops reached petal fall stage and were rated in good to fair condition. Spring weather conditions were not optimal for pollination this year; bee populations in the area had suffered from a harsh winter. Maine wild blueberry growers kept active as they pruned and applied fungicides and herbicides to fields. Cranberries in Massachusetts were in bud stage by month's end, and growers kept watch for fungus and insects.

JUNE: Cool and rainy weather continued from May to June. By mid-month, potatoes, small grains, and shade tobacco were planted, while silage corn, sweet corn, and broadleaf tobacco planting remained behind schedule. Most of the first cut of hay was chopped for silage, as wet weather deterred the making of dry hay. Potato emergence was completed by late June in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island; Maine's potato crop was nearly all emerged by July. Potato crop condition ranged from good to excellent throughout New England. Oats and barley in Maine were fully emerged by month's end, with both crops rated in good to excellent condition. By the end of June, broadleaf tobacco transplanting was 80 percent completed. Tree fruit condition remained steady throughout the month, ranging from fair to good. Crops responded well to the hot, dry weather as June came to a close. Below normal temperatures and rain in the spring caused growers to diligently apply fungicides to their fruit crops. The progress of this year's strawberry crop was well behind normal, with 25 percent harvested; berry size was reported as average to above average. Cranberries in Massachusetts were rated in good condition. Maine's wild blueberries were rated in good condition with average fruit size.

JULY: Hot, sunny weather dominated most of July, providing crops with much needed sunshine and heat, but also drying up soil moisture supplies. Growers irrigated where available. First cut hay harvest neared completion. Rain was needed to improve the second hay crop; dry conditions earlier in the season were expected to decrease quality and yields. Growers prepared for third crop cutting, silage corn remained in good to fair condition, and the late-month rain aided crop growth. Potato growers in the Southern New England States geared up for harvest. Maine potato

condition was reported as excellent to good, despite high counts of European corn borers in fields. Crop specialists rated Maine oat and barley crops in excellent to good condition. Shade tobacco harvest started later than normal while broadleaf tobacco harvest had not begun. Growers sprayed to control blue mold and brown spot. Sweet corn harvest trailed the five-year average by 10 percentage points as the month came to a close. Fruit crops ranged from good to fair condition and rain in late July accelerated fruit growth and improved condition. Growers had not begun to harvest peaches as of late July, placing them one week behind schedule. New England's late-starting strawberry season came to a close by month's end, on schedule with the five-year average. Irrigation in cranberry bogs of Massachusetts helped size up berries; this year's crop remained in good condition.

AUGUST: Hot, humid, and rainy weather dominated the month, turning cool and dry toward month's end, which encouraged increased levels of insect activity and disease; farmers actively sprayed fields for control. Pasture and hay condition continued to improve. By late August, both the third crop of hay and silage corn were rated in good to excellent condition, a significant improvement from earlier ratings. Potato harvest was well underway in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, though slightly behind normal. A small number of cases of potato late blight surfaced in northern Maine, but overall, quality and condition of the main crop remained good to excellent. The small grains harvest in Maine improved. Shade and broadleaf tobacco harvest were both well behind normal progress and rated in fair to good condition. Blue mold had been detected in Connecticut broadleaf fields. Peach harvest continued throughout August and progressed behind schedule after a late start. Apple and pear harvests were underway by month's end. Maine's wild blueberry harvest neared completion and looked to be in good condition. Cranberries in Massachusetts were rated in good condition at month's end; growers irrigated and prepared for the first harvest of white berries.

SEPTEMBER: Early September saw average temperatures with a mix of sun and rain. Growers were well into crop harvest. Hurricane Isabel pushed warm, humid air into New England near mid-September, and the above normal temperatures remained until the end of the month. Second crop hay harvest neared completion by month's end, and third crop was 75 percent finished. Silage corn harvest progress remained behind normal and rated in good to fair condition. Potato harvest progress in Massachusetts was slightly behind normal as October approached, while Rhode Island growers were 10 percentage points ahead of normal progress. Maine potato growers actively harvested and desiccated vines on later varieties; with the crop rated in good condition. Maine oat and barley harvest was on schedule and in good to fair condition. Both broadleaf and shade tobacco harvests were completed. Five percent of the peach crop was left to harvest by the end of the month. Pear harvest progress was behind at 45 percent picked. Apple harvest was on schedule, with 60 percent harvested. Growers completed the harvest of highbush blueberries. White cranberry harvest was completed in a two week period and growers began harvesting red berries later in the month.

OCTOBER-DECEMBER: Cooler temperatures ushered in October. Many areas had their first hard frost at the beginning of the month. Sales at local orchards, farm stands, and farmer markets were outstanding. November began with unseasonably warm temperatures. By mid month, cold windy conditions prevailed. During the first weekend of December, the six-State region was hit by a Nor'easter. Most areas received as much as 24 inches of snow. The latter half of the month brought rain and above normal temperatures. Christmas tree sales were brisk

throughout the first half of the month.