

2006 CROP WEATHER SUMMARY

JANUARY – APRIL: Average temperatures during January and early February ranged seven to ten degrees above normal due to the lack of arctic air moving into the region. Three storms in January brought a mixture of snow and ice to the area; however, the warmer than normal conditions caused the snow and ice to melt quickly. By the end of January, melting snow and rain brought rivers to flood stage in low areas. On February 12, a Nor'easter dumped 20 inches of snow along the coastal region of Massachusetts. A week later, winds as high as 56 miles per hour were reported in parts of the region caused power outages and property damage. Colder temperatures arrived at the end of February and remained through mid-March. Although February provided unfavorable sap flow conditions for northern maple syrup producers, sap production quantity and quality improved throughout March, keeping producers very busy. Warmer weather arrived by the end of March. By mid-April, sunny conditions allowed some farmers to get an advanced start with planting. Heavy rains in Connecticut during the last week of April caused flooding in small rivers and streams. Major farm activities included tending livestock, calving and lambing, tapping maple trees, applying fertilizer, spreading manure/fertilizer, plowing and harrowing fields, working in nursery/greenhouses, fencing and pruning trees.

MAY: The month started off with warm weather and farmers were busy working the fields and planting crops. Heavy rains arrived the second week and continued into the following week, bringing fieldwork to a halt. Flooding occurred in southern New Hampshire, southern Maine, and Massachusetts's north shore, forcing replanting at many locations. Precipitation levels for the month of May exceeded all records along the seacoast. By month's end, warm weather returned and brought sunshine for the Memorial Day weekend. Mid month heavy rains bypassed northern Maine, allowing oat, barley, and potato producers to advance planting well ahead of schedule. Potato planting in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island was in full swing during the month, with most acreage seeded at the end of May. Sweet corn planting had advanced to the halfway mark as the month came to a close. Field corn planting trailed normal at the start of the season, however progress was back on schedule at month's end. Wet weather and lack of sunshine caused tobacco growers to delay setting out shade and broadleaf transplants. Fruit trees were all rated in good condition at the beginning of May however, prolonged wet weather increased the incidence of scab, and condition declined to good to fair by month's end.

JUNE: Cool, wet conditions dominated the beginning of the month. By mid-month, warmer weather arrived to the region, however heavy rains continued to hinder field work. Most of the region received over five inches of rainfall during June with New Bedford, Massachusetts receiving over 10 inches of rain. Maine potato growers delayed plantings due to saturated fields; crop specialists estimated that five percent of planted acreage in Aroostook County was lost due to flooding from June storms. Rhode Island potatoes thrived during the month with conditions rated good to excellent, while full emergence of the Massachusetts potato crop was delayed until the last week of June. Saturated field conditions kept the planting of silage corn and sweet corn up to two weeks behind schedule, and many farmers were forced to re-plant fields completely lost from flooding. Tobacco transplanting was delayed due to the heavy rains, but by the end of June all broadleaf and shade tobacco was set out. Farmer's attempts to bale hay were hindered from saturated fields and few continuous days of dry weather. Strawberry harvest started earlier than normal; by the end of the month 55 percent of the crop was picked. Blueberry growers appreciated the rainfall during June as berry size flourished. At month's end, Massachusetts cranberries reached peak bloom. Heavy rains provided plenty of water for reservoirs, but increased insect pressure.

JULY: Hazy, hot, and humid conditions dominated the month of July, with most areas reporting temperatures averaging at least five degrees above normal. Many fields, already saturated from the abundance of rain in June, were damaged further by scattered thunderstorms throughout the month which brought heavy winds, hail, lightning, flash flooding, and downed trees and power lines. The first sweet corn arrived at farm stands near the end of the month, while silage corn continued to be planted and replanted as late as July 19. Humid conditions in the last week of July helped to spur growth. New England's first cut of hay continued as field conditions permitted, and the second cut had progressed to 30% by month's end. Strawberry harvest completed with many growers reporting a good to average crop, and other growers reporting heavy losses from the month's hot and stormy conditions. Highbush blueberry harvest started ahead of schedule with most areas reporting the crop in good to excellent condition. Tobacco growers began harvesting both broadleaf and shade varieties in July, while keeping a close watch and tight spray

schedule for blue mold. Maine's barley and oat crop were reported to be in good to excellent condition all month. Warm conditions through July helped Maine's potato crop develop; growers maintained a 5-day spray schedule to control late blight outbreaks in Aroostook County and Central Maine.

AUGUST: Oppressive heat and thunderstorms at the start of August gave way to cooler and drier conditions as the month progressed. Although rainfall was not as substantial as earlier in the season, sporadic shower and thunderstorm activity throughout the month slowed field work and frustrated hay producers, who were challenged to make dry hay between the rains. In southern Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island, potato harvest was in full swing by the end of the month, with growers reporting good to excellent conditions. Small grain harvest in Maine began two weeks ahead of schedule. Pumpkin and squash growers reported problems with mildew and fungus as a result of the rainy summer weather. Pears and early season apples arrived on farm stands by mid-month, but growers in southern states were concerned about damage to fruit from high winds and hail from the month's storms. Peach harvest was in full swing in August with three-fourths of the crop picked by month's end. Highbush blueberry and raspberry harvest continued throughout the month with many producers reporting a good crop. Maine Wild Blueberry harvest began and ended a week earlier than normal this year. Cool evening temperatures and rainfall at the start of August improved berry size and quality.

SEPTEMBER: With the start of September came the end of the season's warm weather. Typical days were marked by morning fog, sunny but cool days, and even cooler nights. Some low-lying areas also reported light frosts. Rain, while not as heavy as earlier in the year, came quite frequently throughout the month causing frustration for farmers attempting to harvest fields and attract customers to farm stands. Hay producers kept busy making hay and haylage despite being interrupted by regular shower activity. Silage corn harvest was in full swing by month's end with many producers reporting lower than normal yields. Rhode Island potato harvest progressed well throughout the month of September with growers reporting a good to excellent crop despite the growing conditions. Massachusetts potato harvest was only 60% complete by month's end; about one week behind the five year average. Broadleaf and shade tobacco harvest was complete by mid-month. Producers needed to fire their sheds to remove moisture from tobacco at the start of the month. By month's end the rainy weekends caused an excellent tobacco damp for growers starting to take down tobacco. Rain showers and cooler temperatures were welcome to cranberry growers in Massachusetts who saw berry color, quality, and size improve throughout the month. Apple harvest was in full swing across the region in September with growers reporting the crop to be in good condition. Peach harvest was complete by the end of the month, while pear harvest had advanced to 95% by month's end.

OCTOBER – DECEMBER: October began with clear skies and warmer temperatures leading to brisk business for retail operations during the Columbus Day holiday weekend. Frosts during mid-October caused significant damage to tomatoes and peppers, and brought an end to the harvest of most vegetables. Weekly thunderstorms in late October and November downed trees and standing corn, spread debris into fields, eroded gullies, caused localized flooding of rivers and streams, and kept fields too wet to access. By the end of October, hay producers reported there remained fields of haylage and alfalfa to be cut, but soil moisture limited field access. Intermittent rains and heavy dews made haymaking difficult. Most of New England's silage corn harvest was complete by mid-October, but grain corn harvest continued late into November due to wet weather limiting field access and slowing drying progress. Maine's potato harvest wrapped up by the end of October; two weeks ahead of last year's completion date. Massachusetts and Rhode Island potato harvest completed a week later, delayed by later planting and cooler temperatures during crop development. Cranberry harvest extended two weeks longer than initially anticipated due to the size of this year's crop. Apple harvest was complete approximately one week ahead of schedule this year. On December 1, temperatures exceeded 60 degrees in most areas, and rain fell in all but northern Maine. The season's first snow arrived on December 8, however, warmer daytime temperatures eliminated all traces of snow cover in the region by December 15. In northern Maine, snow flurries could be seen daily as temperatures remained cool throughout the latter parts of the month. However, no accumulating snow arrived until December 26, when nearly 4 inches of snow fell in Aroostook County. Across the rest of New England, snow arrived just in time for New Year's Eve.