

## 2000 CROP-WEATHER SUMMARY

**JANUARY-APRIL:** Toward the end of January, significant snow fell across most of New England. In February, New England's maple sugar growers prepared for the upcoming season. The cold weather and high cost of heating oil increased the expense of keeping greenhouses warm. By mid-April, cool nights and warm days provided excellent sugaring conditions. Farmers stayed busy tending livestock, repairing machinery, and bringing tractors, trucks, and implements out of storage in preparation for the spring planting season.

**MAY:** Weather during the month was cool and wet, slowing planting progress, and making field entry difficult. As weather permitted, harvest of first cut hay was underway by month's end. Potato planting progress in Maine continued at a slow pace due to the rainy weather and saturated fields. By the end of the month, the crop had yet to emerge. By the end of May, most apple and pear trees were in a full bloom or petal fall stage. In many locations, rainy weather affected fruit set and blossom, and increased the incidence of scab.

**JUNE:** The weather across New England was warm, with temperatures above average. As the month came to a close, northern areas had received normal amounts of precipitation, while southern New England was above normal. Farmers were busy trying to get crops planted between rain showers. Crop development was slow, and disease and insect pressures were reported in many areas. Potato planting in Maine was finally completed by the third week in June. The shade tobacco crop was planted behind last year's crop and the five-year average. In Massachusetts, cranberry beds were in full bloom by the end of June, with excellent pollination reported. During the last week of June, farmers were still planting sweet and field corn.

**JULY:** After cool, wet conditions persisted throughout most of July, almost all weather stations in New England reported above normal amounts of precipitation for the 4-week cumulative total. The unusually cool weather was expressed by cumulative growing degree days (base 509) that were almost all below normal; many stations were between 100 and 200 GDD below normal. Farmers were having problems getting hay harvested and dried due to the constant rain. At the beginning of the month, corn fields were still being planted. By the end of the month, emergence was good, but stands were coming in very unevenly, with numerous wet spots in fields. By month's end, only a small amount of shade tobacco had been harvested and broadleaf harvest was just getting underway. The size of fruit was average, with the rain helping to size up fruit after a poor pollination period. Cranberry operators welcomed the rain which restored their water supplies and lessened the need for irrigation. Vegetable farmers stayed busy harvesting their crops and spraying for diseases brought on by all the rain. All vegetable crops were at least two weeks behind, and in need of sunshine.

**AUGUST:** Cool, wet weather continued throughout New England for most of the month causing delays in field activities, slowing maturity of crops and intensifying the impact of disease. In early August, as tobacco harvest was getting underway in the Connecticut River Valley, an *Alternaria* fungus known as brown spot was identified in mature broadleaf tobacco and some shade tobacco. Continued rainy, humid weather intensified the fungus's impact because there is no known way to control its spread in wet conditions. Producers with infected acreage were advised to destroy their crop, either in the field or from the sheds where it was curing. Excessive moisture caused vegetables to rot in the fields, with blossom end rot and blight causing extensive damage to tomatoes. Maine's potato growing region was spared the prolonged wet conditions that the rest of New England endured, and the crop was rated in excellent condition as farmers geared up to begin harvest at month's end. Small grain harvest was just getting underway in Maine, with oat and barley progress far behind normal due to lack of grain maturity. Warm and dry

weather finally arrived in New England the last week of the month. By month's end, the condition of the apple crop was fair, with an increased incidence of scab. The peach and pear crops handled the cool weather slightly better than the apple crop. Massachusetts' cranberry bogs benefitted from the August rains, which supplied plenty of water for wet harvest this fall. The cranberry crop was rated in good condition by month's end, with the berry size average to above average. This season's blueberry harvest neared completion as the month came to a close, with both the highbush and Maine's wild blueberry crops reported in good condition.

**SEPTEMBER:** Cool mornings and dry, sunny afternoons arrived in the New England area and stayed for most of the month, causing field activities to kick into high gear and helping to improve crop maturity. In early September, two mornings of frost were reported in Maine and Vermont, while scattered frost was reported in New Hampshire. By month's end, field corn harvest finally kicked off, but much of the crop was still immature and yields extremely variable. Potato harvest did not shift into full gear in Maine until the end of the month, and ideal harvest conditions prevailed. Maine tuber quality was rated good to excellent at the end of September, with early morning frosts doing little damage to tubers. Maine's oat and barley harvest also had a slow start as growers waited for improved maturity before cutting. Farmers with broadleaf tobacco hanging to cure were forced to take down and destroy leaves from entire sheds because of the damage from brown spot. Vegetable harvest was active across the region as growers took advantage of sunny skies to bring crops to market. Summer long damage from bacterial and fungal infections reduced yields for vegetable crops. The first hard frost of the season hit the entire New England area in late September. Apple and pear harvest had passed the halfway mark by the end of September. Cranberry harvest continued to gain momentum with improved fruit color in response to cool morning temperatures. Maine's wild blueberry harvest was completed by mid-month, on schedule with normal. Peach harvest had wrapped up by the end of the month.

**OCTOBER:** As the month got underway, farmers were actively chopping field corn and digging potatoes. Aside from occasional rain and snow showers, ideal harvest conditions prevailed for the remainder of the potato harvest. Field corn harvest was slow due to lack of maturity. As the month came to a close, harvest was back on schedule with 90 percent of the silage crop chopped, which matched the 5-year average. Frost, in many locations during first full week of the month, brought the vegetable harvest season to a close, in most areas. Second and third cuttings of hay were wrapping up, with the third cut condition being better than previous cuts. Orchardists were finishing up pear picking by the third full week of the month. Apple harvest was winding down, with 95 percent of the crop picked. Fruit size was generally average at many locations due to the cool, wet spring, but quality was good. Maine's wild blueberry farmers were active with field mowing and burning. This year's peach harvest was completed by the first week of the month, on schedule with normal. Cranberry harvest was winding down in Massachusetts by the end of the month, and crop specialists rated the crop in good condition.

**NOVEMBER:** The month started off with cool, showery conditions prevailing across the region. Heavy snow fell in northern New England. By mid-month, widespread rain dampened the northeast, however temperatures were near to above normal in northern New England.

**DECEMBER:** The month began with light snow falling across southern New England. A storm system dumped heavy rain across the northeast. The last weekend in December brought a strong storm which dropped significant amounts of snow throughout the New England area.