

Cold Weather Damages Fruit

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In 1990, peaches bloomed early — on April 8, in Kleiner's recollection — "the earliest I've seen peaches bloom," he said.

However, even though growers "kissed the apricots goodbye" that year, Kleiner said, "some growers had a decent year for the peach crop."

Kleiner sees the same this year. Apricots will be a complete loss, in addition to many plum orchards. But for peaches, the speculation is that Pennsylvania may have some crop, though reports on the nature of the crop won't be available until next week. And so far, the apple orchards, normally better at withstanding temperature drops, still look OK.

Depending on geographical location, this week's dangerously cold overnight temperatures will have effected crops differently.

The apricots are past bloom stage and will be "done in" by the cold, according to Tom Becker, York horticulture agent.

Almost traditionally, peaches can also be hard hit by the cold. When the temperature falls below 23 degrees, about 90 percent of the crop can be killed, according to Becker.

But when the temperature plummets to the teens, as it did this week, widespread devastation can potentially result.

Benner of El Vista Orchards noted that, Wednesday night, the temperature dropped to 16 degrees. One grower told him that, nearby, the temperature fell to 11 degrees, in a valley.

What had Benner worried was that, Wednesday evening, at 10 p.m., the thermometer read 19 degrees — already too cold for peaches, depending on their state of bloom.

As for apple crops, depending on location, the some of the crop could be adversely affected, though many varieties are cold resistant.

Fruit growers are staying quiet, noted Becker, York horticulture agent. Many have assumed a "wait and see" attitude about the effects of the brutal cold on the crops.

Becker doesn't remember seeing a year like this in his career as a horticulturalist. Becker has never seen temperatures that descended "this low, this late," he noted.

For flower enthusiasts, many of

the blooming daffodils were also destroyed by the cold because of stalk and flower freezes.

Covering them simply is not enough. Many growers added a mulch layer, at least, to protect the bulbs from freeze damage.

But for outside garden areas, many areas have experienced a complete loss, especially in the southeastern part of the state, which in many cases is "three to four weeks ahead of schedule or more," noted Becker.

Many growers won't know the full extent of the damage until end of April and early May, according to Kleiner, regional fruit specialist.

In any cold spell, the buds further out on the branches can be hardest hit, as well as the weaker buds. Buds closer to the tree have a higher survivability.

Kleiner noted that, because of the heaviness of cold air, growers know to locate fruit trees on ridges. Orchard location is key. Trees in basins can fall prey to severe cold. However, the cold was widespread throughout the region with high winds, in many cases, which could have a large-scale impact on crops, according to growers.

Lately, there have been a lot more frosts that concern the fruit specialists. Where frosts and freezes were noted severe every 1 year in 10, growers have had three years in the past five to warrant concern, according to Kleiner.

In the case of the Adams County orchardist, speed of discoloration is relative to the heat of the day. In other words, the cold damage to the buds of peaches won't be evident until a few days of warmer temperatures pass by.

And with temperatures dropping below 25 for several days, growers can do nothing to stop the damage to the crop.

"I can make no business decision on how good or how bad it affected me until the weekend," said Benner. Benner warned that any grower who "cries wolf and claims they are wiped out" is not being honest. They need to take time on warmer days to look at the actual damage.

The only thing growers can do is "sit there and pray," Kleiner, regional fruit specialist, said.

Fruit growers in Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, and North Carolina — where the peach fruit was in bloom — were devastated by the killing cold, according to

National Letter Writing Campaign Launched To Save Valuable Pesticides

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reassessment process are critical, Vroom points out, because they can result in restriction or cancellation of the use of a specific pesticide on certain crops.

Organophosphates, First To Be Evaluated — Carbamates Next

EPA says it will first reassess organophosphates (OPs), valued insecticides used to control an extensive array of crop pests. This widely used crop protection class includes chlorpyrifos (Dursban), azinphos methyl (Guthion), disulfoton (Disyston), malathion, parathion, diazinon, and acephate (Orthene). The OPs are used on some 64 million acres of the nation's farmland and have been the main line of defense against crop loss to insects for 40 years, Vroom says.

A second widely used class of insecticides, carbamates, is soon to follow on EPA's reassessment list. This group, used to protect a range of crops from apples and cotton to peanuts, potatoes and soybeans, includes such products as Temik, Sevin, Furadan, Carzol, Lannate, Vydate and Larvin.

Rush To Judgment

Vroom notes that industry and agriculture accepted FQPA when passed hurriedly in late 1996. "We supported many of its provisions," he says, "because the act's fundamentals are ones to which my industry has long subscribed — human health and safety, extra margins of safety for children. Its requirements are strict, but achievable, if EPA — rather than a rush to judgment on many of the essential pesticides growers need for profitable farming — takes time to allow development of needed scientific data and methods to meet FQPA requirements. "Then," Vroom adds, "regulatory decisions can be based on well-conceived, uniform and practical policies rather than highly exaggerated estimates. Right now, that is not being done."

media reports. What effects this will have on peach supplies for the Mid-Atlantic are hard to determine.

As for the mild winter in Pennsylvania, many suspected that a cold-down was inevitable.

Said York horticulture agent Tom Becker, "We knew it would have to catch up to us sometime."

Instead, the agency appears to be setting pesticide tolerances (the amount of a pesticide's residue allowed on or in a harvested crop) based on theoretical estimates, or defaults, in cases where data based on actual use is not yet available. EPA's rationale is that it must meet the short deadlines imposed by FQPA, Vroom says. But, congressional mandates under FQPA can be met without undue risk to farm and consumer use. Farmer and grower pest control products need not be placed in jeopardy.

Farmers Urged To Act Now

A concerned, vocal agriculture is essential to preserve needed crop protection products within farmers' arsenals. Vroom urges farmers: "Contact your com-

modity organization about your concern, then your member of Congress, EPA and The White House. Tell them to help save the pesticides you need to protect your crop and your farm income. Insist that science, not politics, be followed in implementing the Food Quality Protection Act.

Vroom concludes, "When the law is carried out the way Congress intended, the consumer wins, the farmer wins and America's agricultural productivity is not placed in jeopardy."

For more information on helping save needed crop pesticides, or about the Food Quality Act, access ACPA website — <http://www.acpa.org/>.

Jr. Holstein Embryo Sale

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — The Pennsylvania Junior Holstein Association will sponsor an Embryo Sale as part of the Pennsylvania Showcase Sale on Thursday, March 26, at 7 p.m. at the Farm Show Building - Small Arena, Harrisburg. The Junior Association wants to publicly thank the 11 breeders who have donated an embryo to support our Junior Activities in Pennsylvania.

The breeders and embryos are as follows:

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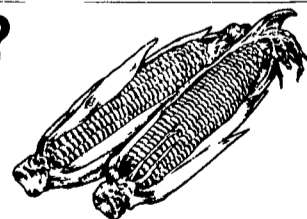
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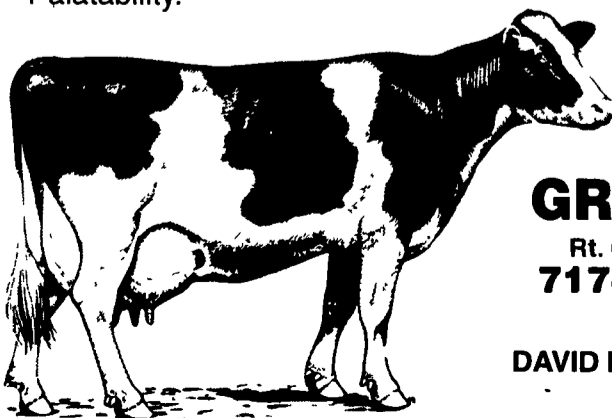
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