



# F r e s h ALERT

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## FLORIDA FREEZE

### GROWERS SAY A CATASTROPHE WAS AVERTED

For the most part, farmers in Florida, from the panhandle to Miami, are breathing a sigh of relief. A catastrophe was averted last week as sub-freezing temperatures hit the Sunshine state, plunging overnight temperatures into the 20s for several hours. Farmers from all over Florida have assessed their crops, but it appears the state largely escaped serious damage from a polar pummeling.

Florida farmers said wind -- more than the cold snap -- could turn out to be the biggest culprit, with some fruits and vegetables looking a little haggard and not "cosmetically appealing." Young, tender vegetables will have more scarring on them said Lisa Lochridge, public affairs director for the [Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association](#).



[Professor Jeff Williamson](#) of the [Univ. of Florida](#) checks a [blueberry](#) crop for freeze damage. Ice insulates the plants from cold.

Also, the cold and wind caused considerable "blossom drop" to all row-crop vegetables like bell peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, squash, tomatoes and even strawberries. Every blossom is a piece of fruit or vegetable. This will affect supplies about 45 – 60 days from now, right at the height of Valentine's Day demand, especially for Strawberries.

The state's \$1.3 billion citrus crop made it through the freeze largely unscathed. There may have been some spotty fruit damage in low-lying areas of the state, said [Florida Citrus Mutual](#) spokesman Andrew Meadows, "but we are not hearing of any significant problems, certainly not any tree damage."

Although time may reveal that vegetables and strawberries were affected more than citrus, overall the cold blast was not a major killer for the Florida agriculture industry, although there are "pockets around the state" where some farmers saw 100% damage to their row crop vegetables or tomatoes. Overall, most farmers are saying that about 20% of the vegetables, tomatoes and strawberries were lost.



[Strawberries](#) in Plant City, Florida being sprayed with water to protect from sub-freezing temperatures last week.



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