

Preparing for the Cold

Just a reminder that “cold” weather is just around the corner, as you are well aware. With the recent cool nights and days, let’s use this as a tool to focus on what could be ahead.

One of the challenges in farming is one never knows exactly what winter weather will bring. We know winters here in Volusia County are relatively mild. Winters in Florida are generally very pleasant with afternoon temperatures near 70°F and minimum temperatures ranging from 40°F to 60°F. But punctuating the mild weather are occasional freezes. These temperatures maybe light, (upper-twenties); moderate, (mid-twenties); and severe, (low-twenties). What we don’t know is how bad and how long the freezes last.

According to National Weather Service National Headquarters in Melbourne, Florida, last year was an exception to the norm! December 29th was the first day the temperature dipped into the mid-thirties, preceded with 12 days of lows into the forties. In January, there were five days in the twenties, with January 10th having the lowest temperature of 27°F.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), (http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2010/20101021_winteroutlook.html): “The South and Southeast will be warmer and drier than average through February 2011”. A moderate to strong La Niña will be the dominant climate factor influencing weather across most of the U.S. this winter.

La Niña - El Niño, what are the differences?

La Niña is associated with cooler than normal water temperatures in the Equatorial Pacific Ocean, unlike El Niño which is associated with warmer than normal water temperatures. Both of these climate phenomena, which typically occur every 2-5 years, influence weather patterns throughout the world and often lead to extreme weather events. Last winter’s El Niño contributed to record-breaking rain and snowfall leading to severe flooding in some parts of the country, with record heat and drought in other

parts of the country. Although La Niña is the opposite of El Niño, it also has the potential to bring weather extremes to parts of the nation.

El Niño is the warming of the tropical Pacific Ocean that occurs irregularly at about 3-6 year intervals in response to large scale weakening of the trade winds that normally blow westward from South America toward Asia. The trade winds produce cool surface water in the eastern Pacific, through evaporation and the upwelling of colder water from below the surface. In unison, they "corral" warm surface waters over in the far western Pacific. As the trade winds weaken, so does the containment of the warm water in the west and the maintenance of the coolness in the east. As a result, warm water becomes ubiquitous all across the Pacific from New Guinea to South America. Although the immediate cause (wind weakening) is known and scientists have made much progress in understanding the phenomenon, unfortunately, the exact nature of the processes that govern its repetitive cycle are still not certain.

At present, "La Niña is in place and will strengthen and persist through the winter months, giving us a better understanding of what to expect between December and February," said Mike Halpert, deputy director of the Climate Prediction Center – a division of the National Weather Service. "This is a good time for people to review the outlook and begin preparing for what winter may have in store. Other climate factors will play a role in the winter weather at times across the country," added Halpert.

Although NOAA states that the forecast of Florida will be drier than average with an equal chance for above, near, or below-normal temperatures, let's not be caught off guard. It is always better to plan and prepare for the coming cold. For further information on freeze protection, please review the information on this site: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ss509>.

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