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**FLORIDA GROWERS ASSESS IMPACT  
OF COLDEST WEATHER OF THE SEASON**  
*Damage, crop losses likely in some parts of the state*

MAITLAND, Fla. (January 22, 2009) – Fruit and vegetable producers on Thursday were assessing damages from overnight freezing temperatures across much of the state. Temperatures fell well below 32 for several hours, a situation that could cause severe damage and extensive crop losses.

“It’s early yet to know the full impact, but there was a combination of factors that made for a very long night for most growers,” said Lisa Lochridge, public affairs director for FFVA. “Producers are used to dealing with whatever Mother Nature hands them, whether it’s a hurricane, drought or a freeze like this one. It comes with the territory. They were as prepared as they could possibly be.”

Temperatures in the Everglades Agricultural Area around Lake Okeechobee had dropped below freezing by 2 a.m. and continued to fall, spelling trouble for the sweet corn, snap bean, lettuce and leafy greens crops. One grower on the east side of Lake Okeechobee – typically the warmer side – reported a low of 23, adding that he had never seen temperatures that cold so close to the lake.

“It looks like this may have been a bad one for the sweet corn and snap bean crops that were up,” Lochridge said. Some growers sent helicopters up around 10 p.m., and they flew all night. The aircraft push warmer air down onto the crops and circulate air to keep frost from forming. Others growers decided against that option because they didn’t think it would be effective.

Temperatures in the mid- to upper 20s inflicted damage on the tomato-growing region in southwest Florida as well as the Palmetto/Ruskin area, although it will be two to three days before the full extent of the damage is known, Lochridge said.

South Florida citrus growers in some areas reported heavy frost in trees and hard ice in fruit in some areas. Damage could be serious, depending on the area, Lochridge said.

“Producers arm themselves with every available tool to protect their crops from these kinds of damaging freezes. But there’s only so much they can do,” Lochridge said.

Strawberry growers use overhead irrigation, coating plants with a protective layer of ice to keep them warmer than sub-freezing air temperatures. Wind can be a problem, however, if it blows the spray and keeps it from landing on the plants.

In South Florida, vegetable growers can raise the water level in irrigation ditches, but the plants remain vulnerable. Wind also can be a significant threat to tender plants such as squash, peppers and leafy greens.

Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association ([www.ffva.com](http://www.ffva.com)) is an agricultural trade organization representing Florida’s producers of fruits, vegetables and other crops.