

Freezing temperatures predicted

By Pete Gawda

Okeechobee News

After below freezing weather last week, latest weather reports show that the Okeechobee area could be in for more winter weather over the coming week-end. The National Weather Service is predicting a low tonight of around 34 degrees with wind chills near 27. Saturday night should be a little warmer with a predicted low of around 36.

According to Pat Miller of the Okeechobee County Extension Service, home gardeners should cover plants with fabric -- not

plastic -- all the way to the ground and maybe put a light bulb under the covering. However, there is some good news, as a result of last week's cold weather. Mr. Miller said that if the plants weren't damaged last week, they probably won't be damaged this weekend, and if they were damaged by last week's cold spell, they will not be hurt any worse this weekend.

Last week's cold snap could have been a lot worse for Okeechobee County crops. How cold was it? The Okeechobee County Airport recorded lows

of 32 degrees on Jan. 22, 29 degrees on Jan. 23 and 36 degrees on Jan. 24. Outlying areas of the county experienced lower temperatures.

The hardest hit crop, according to the extension service was the potato crop in the northern part of the county which sustained about a 25 percent loss. Some of the nurseries reported damage to the more sensitive palms and it could be several months before they are marketable.

Many homeowners reported damage to their tomato plants.

Local dairyman Red Larson reported last week's cold snap had little effect on his dairy herds. He added that for a day or two the cold wind caused milk production to drop slightly because the cows did not eat much. Mr. Larson took precautions to make sure his generators were in good order in case of power failure and water pipes were protected to keep them from freezing. He said the baby calves came through the cold snap very well.

Sonny Williamson, of Williamson Cattle Company, stated

there was some damage to his citrus groves, but it was not extensive. He did not yet know the percentage of damage but there was slush in the top of the trees that will reduce the amount of juice produced. There was not a lot of damage to the limbs. Mr. Williamson said they were at the edge of extensive damage at 28 degrees. When the temperature drops to 26 degrees for extended periods, he said the fruit will freeze and long term damage will be caused to the limbs.

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