

Okeechobee spared most freeze damage

The hard freeze predicted for Okeechobee County Tuesday and Wednesday was not as serious as originally projected, and little crop damage was reported, according to the Okeechobee County Extension Office.

There were only a few incidences of frost or freeze damage to crops reported in our area from this week's low temperatures.

"I have not heard of damage to citrus fruit, although some frost was seen in some protected areas," stated Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent Daniel Culbert.

He said he expects pastures to have some slowdown in green forage production, which may have a future impact on livestock operations.

"At a nursery in the northeast part of Okeechobee—west of Fort Pierce, south of Fort Drum—they reported Tuesday evening temperatures in the lower 30s. Tender plants were brought inside; other landscape plants that were left under sprinklers last night did not show cold damage Wednesday morning. There was a particularly attractive azalea bush in full bloom that had suffered no ill effects," Mr. Culbert continued.

One nursery worker reported that temperatures in Indiantown were at 35 Tuesday

night, he said.

Eagle Island Farms in northwestern Okeechobee County has several thousand acres of cabbage, potatoes and sweet onions in the ground. Low temperatures around freezing occurred, but were not sustained, and winds kept frost from forming in most areas. They reported some limited frost damage to potatoes grown at one location near Basinger.

The cold temperatures may be of value in hardening up most crops in preparation for future cold fronts, he said.

Wes Williamson, of Williamson Cattle Company, which has citrus groves, said his groves were spared damage since it was not cold enough for long enough. On Tuesday night the temperature on the property got down to 27 degrees. On Wednesday night he said the temperature dropped an additional degree to 26. His pastures were not so fortunate. He said they will now have to provide supplemental feed for the cattle.

Homeowners whose landscape plants were damaged by the cold are advised to leave the plants alone and wait and see how they do.

The best advice for home landscapes: DO

NOT PRUNE, advised Mr. Culbert. "Pruning brings out new growth that can get hurt in future cold fronts."

Don't fertilize freeze damaged plants, he continued. Fertilizing also encourages new growth, which can be damaged by future cold fronts.

Keep up with watering if the soil is dry, but don't get it too wet.

For more information see the Okeechobee Extension Office web site at <http://okeechobee.ifas.ufl.edu/> or call the Extension Office at 863-763-6469.