

Extreme Weather Impacts Agriculture

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Imagine being a business owner and one of the things that significantly impacts your business is 100% out of your control. It rains today and snows tomorrow. It's 20 below zero on Monday and by Tuesday it's 40 degrees. The impact that weather has on agriculture can be and has been significant, and it's completely out of the hands of the farm owner.

New York State is home to some of the most vital, robust land one can find, and it's also no surprise that it is also home to a vastly diverse agricultural population. Surrounded by wineries, orchards, dairy farms, greenhouses, u-pick businesses, and so much more, we are fortunate to have high-quality agricultural products at our fingertips throughout our region. But sometimes there are challenges that face these farm owners every single year and it begins with the weather outside our front door.

Take a moment to think back to summer of 2016. A lot of us spent most of our days lounging by the lake or kicking back poolside in our backyards while farmers were found standing in their fields, examining their crops and perhaps even doing a rain dance. Many regions of the state were declared a disaster area due to severe drought conditions. Follow these weather patterns up with a warmer than normal winter in 2017, only to see an incredibly wet spring that hindered farmers everywhere and had many of them questioning how they were going to get their crops planted. A wet spring in 2017 meant not only planting was delayed, but product quality and quantity diminished. Most recently, farmers have experienced bitter cold temperatures for extended periods of time, and extreme temperature swings making it difficult to plan, decide or implement farm practices.

So what's the big deal? What's the impact? The impact can include the loss of crops due to one extreme or another which could result in higher prices for both consumer and farmer alike. The quality, taste and quantity of the products we consume are also impacted by the forecast. For example, the vineyards that we are all surrounded by grow a wide variety of grapes each year with each variety producing a different type of wine or juice. The end product of wine or juice is impacted by how the grape grows which ultimately is weather dependent. Where and how a grape grows is eventually what will determine what kind of wine or juice that grape will be turned into.

Fruit trees, orchards, and u-pick operations typically provide an experience for consumers to enjoy with their families. When was the last time you went to the local strawberry patch and picked strawberries in the pouring rain? Or went apple picking with your family in extremely hot, dry conditions. Not only is the experience impacted, but the quality of the product you're picking is affected by the sun in the sky or the raindrops falling down. Lower yields and more tart tasting berries are the result of wet weather conditions along with the time it takes for the berries to ripen and are ready to be picked. The weather in the Finger Lakes doesn't just impact the farmers' bottom line, but also the experience that their customers are having when they arrive on their farms.

As you drive down any rural road in New York State, you're sure to see a dairy farm or two. While the weather may not directly impact consumers, it does impact the feed that is provided to the cows, the pastures they graze on and their overall well-being. Extreme temperatures, both hot and cold, require additional work on the farmers' part to ensure their herds are either warm enough or cool enough to continue to produce a high-quality milk product. The pastures the cows graze on and fields that crops are grown on are impacted by the amount of rain that is received or not received. Different field

conditions affect the digestibility of the crops, which impacts the quality and quantity of milk production on the farm.

So while some enjoy the over-abundance amount of sunny days during the summer, there are others throughout the rural region that may be doing a rain dance. Or if rain decides to arrive just as you're planning on starting up the grill for that Fourth of July BBQ, those rain drops may be just what the farmers in the area need to keep their crops alive for the year. No matter the weather condition, farmers continue to focus on what they can control and leave the rest to Mother Nature.

For more information about New York State agriculture, feel free to contact New York Farm Bureau at www.nyfb.org to learn more about how you can play a role in the future of this industry.