

Preparing for

Once again, Florida citrus growers look forward to the rainy season to help grow their citrus fruit to maturity. Along with the anticipation of the rainy season is the reality of hurricane season.

Sometimes it seems like hocus-pocus when the prognostications are made. A week after AccuWeather announced its prognostications for the 2011 Atlantic hurricane season, the Colorado State University's (CSU) mountain folks who never experience a hurricane are once again predicting an above-average storm season. The prediction is due in large measure to the fact that we are in a multi-decadal cycle that began in 1995. The 16-year period between 1979 and 1994 saw 25 major (Cat. 3, 4 or 5) hurricanes. The 16 years since have witnessed 61 hurricanes. The CSU scientists expect the cycle to continue for another 10 to 15 years before switching back to a less active phase.

The CSU forecast is very close to the one issued by AccuWeather, except for a slightly more aggressive prediction on the number of "major" storms — Cat. 3 and above. AccuWeather predicts 15 named storms and eight hurricanes, including three major ones. Although the U.S. National Weather Forecasters predicted 16 named storms, Colorado State predicts 17 named storms with nine hurricanes, of which five will be major hurricanes. That compares with 19 tropical storms, 12 hurricanes and five major hurricanes during the 2010 season that ended last November.

The CSU team is led by Phil Klotzbach of the CSU Tropical Meteorology Project. He points to several factors contributing to the calculations. "We expect that anomalously warm tropical Atlantic sea surface temperatures, combined with neutral tropical Pacific sea surface temperatures, will contribute to an active season." The tropical Pacific is important because El Niño (above-average sea surface temperatures in the eastern and central tropical Pacific) tends to suppress hurricane development in the Atlantic, while La Niña or neutral temperature conditions tend to allow storm development. After a La Niña winter in 2010-2011, the sea surface temperatures in the Pacific have been warming up and are expected to be neutral this summer.

The coastal regions of the United States have been extraordinarily lucky in recent years, except for the

destructive hurricane seasons of 2004-2005. The three hurricanes impacting citrus in 2004 were Charley (August), ripping the Gulf Coast up through Central Florida, and Frances and Jeanne (September), which



hurricane season

By Bob Rouse and Mongi Zekri

devastated east coast groves. In 2005, Wilma (October) caused fruit loss and some tree loss in South Florida.

The U.S. coast hasn't experienced any other major landfall hurricanes since 1999. The Colorado team predicts a 72 percent chance that at least one major hurricane will make landfall in the United States this year. The chances for landfall of a major storm along the East Coast from Florida north are put at 48 percent.

The bottom line is that predictions are dubious and a curiosity and shouldn't affect what we must do. We must prepare every year, regardless of weather predictions. Little can be done to protect trees and fruit from hurricane velocity wind, but we can take steps to protect the people, equipment and supplies that will be needed for the recovery. Below is a checklist for citrus grove managers.

HURRICANE PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Personnel assignments:

1. Make a list of all tasks and make assignments.
2. Update the names on the damage inspection team.
3. Update worker contact list and means for them to call in after the storm.

Safety training:

Train workers in the safe operation of unfamiliar equipment they may have to use. Example: Drivers may have to use chain saws to remove downed trees blocking roads.

Insurance:

Buildings, equipment including tractors, irrigation parts and supplies may be damaged.

Buildings:

1. Close storm shutters or board up windows.

2. Store loose, lightweight objects such as garbage cans and tools.

Liquid tanks:

1. Keep fuel, fertilizer and other tanks full so they don't move in the wind.
2. Ensure sufficient fuel is available.

Roads and ditches:

1. Roads should be cleared and graded and kept well-maintained, and ditches kept clean and pumped down.
2. Arrange with a flying service for a grove manager to survey grove damage.

Emergency equipment:

1. Test-run generators, chain saws, torches, air compressors and other equipment.
2. Have shovels, slings, fuel, paint and equipment parts available in good repair.
3. Know where to obtain backhoes, front-end loaders and other heavy equipment.

Communications equipment:

1. Ensure that radios are in good working order.
2. Have hand-held portable radios with extra charged battery packs available.
3. Direct truck-to-truck radio and cellular phones save valuable time during recovery.

Hazardous materials:

1. Hazardous materials should be secured prior to a storm.
2. Gasoline pumps should be shut down.

Emergency contacts:

Have a list of emergency phone numbers, including electric companies, sheriff and medical.

Cultural practices:

1. Regular pruning can reduce

broken limbs and minimize toppled or uprooted trees.

2. Windbreaks reduce tree damage and spread of citrus canker bacterium.

HURRICANE RECOVERY CHECKLIST

Damage inspection:

Make a visual assessment of the damage and determine priorities and equipment needed.

Prioritize damage:

A priority plan can quickly determine where and how to begin recovery operations.

Employee call-in:

When safe, call in those needed for damage inspection and grove recovery work.

Clear road access:

Clear roads to where trees must be reset or recovery activities must be conducted.

Water removal:

Remove excess water from tree root zones within 72 hours to avoid root damage.

Tree rehabilitation:

1. Resetting trees to an upright position should be accomplished as soon as possible.

2. Toppled trees should be pruned back to sound wood.

3. Painting exposed trunks and branches with white latex paint helps prevent sunburn.

Irrigation:

Check the irrigation system as rehabilitation is a long process and water is critical.

Fertilizer:

1. The major fertilizer elements should be applied when new growth begins.

2. Reset toppled trees will require less fertilizer due to reduced root system and tree canopy.

3. Reduce N fertilizer to remaining trees proportional to canopy or leaf loss.

4. The following year, trees may require more-than-normal rates to re-establish canopy.

5. Micronutrients should be applied in nutritional sprays to the leaves.

Weeds:

Resume row middle mowing and herbicide applications on a normal schedule.

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We Won The Battle But Not The War



By Michael W. Sparks

Through a unified lobbying effort by Florida's business groups and strong support from key legislators, the state Senate recently rejected a measure (SB 2040) to require all employers to use E-Verify.

This was a huge victory for all of us who understand the realities of today's workplace, not only in agriculture, but also the hospitality and construction industries.

E-Verify is an Internet-based program run by the government that compares information from an employee's I-9 form to data from federal records. If there's a mismatch, E-Verify alerts the employer and the employee. The result could be that the employee might not be eligible to work.

U.S. immigration policy is broken and it is unfortunate that misguided state legislatures across the country are passing laws like SB 2040 that they think will fix it. I've got news for them; immigration can only be resolved at the federal level. Secure borders, enforcement and a workable guest-worker program are all under the purview of the federal government. This is not a problem that can be solved piecemeal.

Florida Citrus Mutual worked with its agriculture allies including FFVA, FNGLA and the Florida Farm Bureau as well as Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam to communicate to legislators our grave concerns with SB 2040. We also had strong partners from the state's business community such as the Florida Chamber of Commerce and Associated Industries of Florida.

The effort to defeat SB 2040 included hundreds of e-mails and phone calls from Mutual members to legislators asking them to oppose the bill. The grassroots campaign was effective. This was a textbook example of how our legislative friends, behind the scenes lobbying and grassroots support can be a powerful combination.

There can be no mandatory E-Verify without a workable federal guest-worker program. Right now H-2A is inadequate. Mutual is talking to the Florida delegation about necessary changes to H-2A that would make the program useful to both employers and workers.

We will have to continue to be vigilant at the state and federal level on this issue because it is not going away. The U.S. Congress will soon take up E-Verify and possibly comprehensive immigration reform. I can assure you Mutual will be poised and ready to communicate our issues to members of Congress.

Michael W. Sparks is the Executive Vice President/CEO of Florida Citrus Mutual, the state's largest citrus grower organization.



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