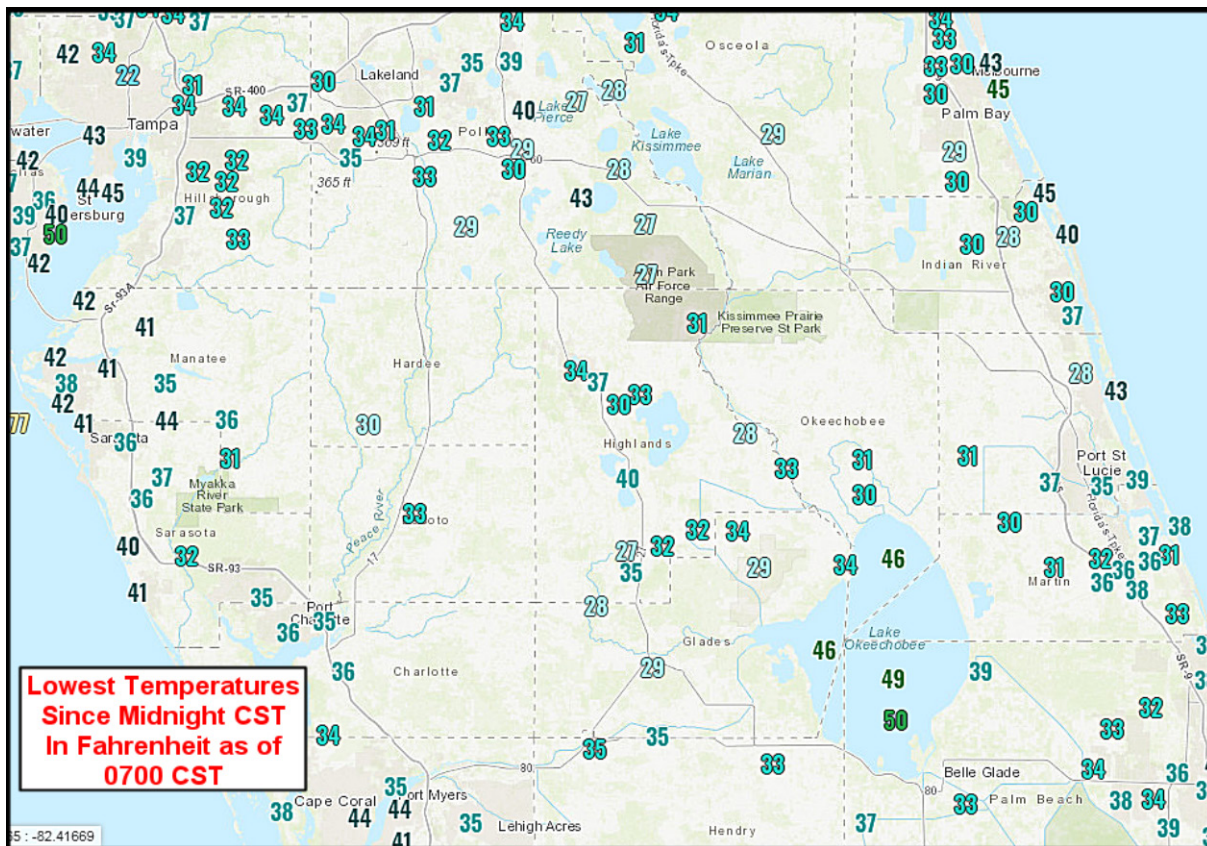


Central Florida Freezes Hit Citrus Areas With Low Impact

By Drew Lerner

Kansas City, February 4 (World Weather Inc.) – Temperatures slipped below freezing this morning in central Florida citrus production areas. Several areas slipped into the upper 20s near the Lake Wales Ridge otherwise known as the Mid-Florida Ridge. The impact of cold on citrus fruit should have been low with some crops benefiting from the cold by helping to raise sugar content in the maturing fruit. Irrigation should have protected most crops from any permanent damage. Some sugarcane was also impacted, but no permanent effect was suspected on that crop.



Several low temperatures slipped into the upper 20s from the Lake Pierce area of Polk County southward through Avon Park area to the Highlands/Okeechobee county common border. Other areas of upper 20-degree low temperatures occurred in Glades County and in the southwest corner of Highlands. Most of the coldest temperatures noted through 0700 CST today were 27 to 32 degrees and much of the cold concentrated near the Lake Wales Ridge. Other reports of frost and lighter freezes came in from many other areas in central Florida citrus and sugarcane country with readings mostly in the 30s Fahrenheit.

Frost and freezes will damage leaves on many citrus trees and a little leaf droppage may occur as a result. However, the cool conditions will have a positive impact on sugar levels in the fruit which will make for better concentrate. Most of the subfreezing conditions were not low enough for a long enough period of time to permanently damage any of the fruit especially in areas where irrigation was used to keep

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temperatures higher by raising humidity and inducing ice formation. None of this year's Blossom buds should have been permanently harmed by the cold and the stress of dryness and the cold could lead to a more profuse flowering this spring.

A weak high pressure center was responsible for clearing out the skies and allowing temperatures to drop overnight. The high pressure center will abate from the region today and Friday and warming will return. Rain is also expected as the warming trend gets under way this weekend and a little more precipitation will fall early next week. The moisture will help crops begin to recover from the cold impact.

Sugarcane growth might be set back by the cold, but as long as weather occurs normally during the spring the crop should recover without a lingering impact.

Cold air will be abundant in the Midwest and Plains this week and some of that cold may eventually come to the southeastern United States, but there is no particular day that is being advertised as a viable threat to citrus areas today. The situation will be closely monitored, but there is no risk of additional frost or freezes for at least the next week.

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