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## Michigan apple growers assess freeze damage

May 20, 2020



Apple blossom time is here, and Michigan Apple growers continue their work to ensure a strong crop for the 2020 harvest.

“Along the Fruit Ridge area of Michigan, just north of Grand Rapids, apple trees will be in full bloom by this weekend,” said Diane Smith, executive director of the Michigan Apple Committee. “The freezing temperatures from earlier this month only caused minimal damage and we are hearing confidence from growers and the industry that Michigan will produce a healthy crop of apples this

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fall.”

Growers battled freezing temperatures over three nights in early May to protect their crops. Temperatures descended into the low 20s, and growers employed frost fans, sprinklers, fires and other methods to keep temperatures up in the orchards.

“After the crop loss in 2012 Michigan Apple growers made significant investments in frost protection equipment,” said Smith. “That preparedness served them well this year as they were well-equipped to fend off the freeze damage. One grower commented to me that over one night his frost fan paid for itself.”

According to Amy Irish-Brown, MSU Extension Educator, a cold start to spring and the great climate in Michigan (including lake effect buffering of the harsh conditions) kept trees delayed in development, providing more protection from the cold.

“Normally, orchards would have been in full bloom when the freezes came through, but they were only in tight cluster. Flower buds are tougher in the cold in tight cluster than bloom, and the cold temps were not as devastating as they would have been had we been in bloom,” said Irish-Brown.

Irish-Brown said southwest Michigan saw more damage in its apple blossoms, as it was further along in bud development and it was colder there during the freezes. Northwest Michigan is several days behind downstate and it is simply too early to tell if any damage took place. The Fruit Ridge, which is responsible for approximately 75 percent of Michigan’s apple production, saw less damage.

“My colleagues and I feel good about saying we still have 95 percent of a crop. Certain varieties were hurt more than others, which is expected for varieties that are always more sensitive to cold damage — Red Delicious, Jonagold, Fuji — but some sites even have decent crops of these, so the damage is quite variable,” she said.

Michigan Apple growers harvest an average of approximately 25 million bushels of apples each year. There are more than 14.9 million apple trees in commercial production, covering 34,500 acres on 775 family-run farms in Michigan.

The Michigan Apple Committee is a grower-funded nonprofit organization devoted to marketing, education and research activities to distinguish the Michigan apple and encourage its consumption in Michigan and around the world. For more information, visit [MichiganApples.com](http://MichiganApples.com).

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