

Florida's largest citrus grower organization has criticized the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for not postponing its 2017-18 crop forecast in light of damages from Hurricane Irma in September.

The USDA's recent October forecast estimated Florida's orange production would be at 54 million boxes, but a grower damage survey from Florida Citrus Mutual (FCM) indicates the level is more likely to be at 31 million boxes.

In a release today, FCM said it believed the agency could not accurately account for the full extent of the catastrophic damage from Hurricane Irma, emphasizing that historically the USDA has a high margin of error in crop years with a natural disaster.



Photo courtesy of Florida Department of Agriculture.

"I'm disappointed the USDA did not delay the traditional October crop estimate until more data could be collected to fully assess the damage wrought by Irma," said Florida Citrus Mutual executive VP and CEO Michael W. Sparks.

"Irma hit us just a month ago and although we respect the skill and professionalism of the USDA, there is no way they can put out a reliable number in that short time period."

On September 10, 2017 Hurricane Irma moved through the center of the state hitting Florida's major citrus producing regions with up to 120 mph winds. The hurricane blew fruit off trees and caused widespread tree damage.

An FCM survey of growers conducted post Irma pegged total fruit loss at more than 50% with some reports of 100% fruit loss in the Southwest part of the state.

"The long-term effect of Irma on our industry will take years to sort out," said Sparks.

"We had groves underwater and those trees aren't just going to bounce back and continue producing fruit. They are gone."

"Just like when the hurricanes hit in 2004-2005 and dramatically re-shaped our industry. Irma was a historic event that dealt Florida citrus a major blow."

Related story: [U.S.: South Florida citrus crop loss estimated at 50-70%, says FFVA](#)

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