

Florida citrus takes another hit as forecast falls another 7.4%

Florida's struggling and storm-battered citrus industry took another hit Thursday as the USDA orange crop forecast for the current growing season was reduced by 7.4 percent.

And industry officials anticipate the forecasts will continue to decline as the season progresses.

"Unfortunately, I don't think this will be the last decrease we see," said Shannon Shepp, executive director of the Florida Department of Citrus. "Hurricane Irma had widespread impact on our industry, and growers are still trying to pick up the pieces. High winds and flooding rains damaged already weakened trees making it even more difficult to hold on to the fruit that's left."

The projection from the U.S. Department of Agriculture is that the Florida citrus industry will produce enough oranges to fill 50 million 90-pound boxes and 4.65 million similar sized boxes of grapefruit during the 2017-2018 season.

A month ago, the forecast for the already-dire season — following damage from Irma and years of losses from deadly citrus greening disease — was a decades-low 54 million boxes of oranges and 4.9 million boxes of grapefruit.

The latest numbers would result in a 27 percent decrease for oranges from the past season, with grapefruit production falling 40 percent.

Putnam and , along with members of the state's congressional delegation, unsuccessfully pushed to have Florida's agriculture industry added to recent federal disaster-aid packages.

Meanwhile, Gov. Rick Scott has announced he will ask for \$21 million to help struggling citrus growers as part of his upcoming budget requests for the 2018 legislative session.

Scott wants the money to include \$10 million for citrus research, \$4 million for marketing and \$7 million for post-storm relief.

Source : <http://www.freshplaza.com/article/184739/Florida-citrus-takes-another-hit-as-forecast-falls-another-7.4-procent>