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# Florida orange crop to be smallest in almost two decades

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**FORT PIERCE** - With citrus still suffering the effects from hurricanes in 2004 and 2005, a cold snap earlier this year and a continued loss of land for trees, this year's Florida orange crop will be the smallest since the 1989-1990 season, agriculture officials said today.

Orange production is expected to be 135 million boxes this season, down 9 percent from last year's 147.9 million 90-pound boxes.

Grapefruit production is up considerably -- 26 million boxes projected for this season compared with just over 19 million boxes harvested last season -- but grapefruit is still far lower than historical levels, today's first U.S. Department of Agriculture citrus crop estimate shows.

But citrus will likely fetch very good prices for growers, and may force consumers to dig deeper in their pockets for orange juice, experts predict. Retail prices are about 9 percent higher than last year, citrus officials say.

"It is obvious that the citrus trees of Florida continue to feel the stresses caused by high wind, including the accelerated spread of diseases and pests." said Bob Norberg, deputy executive director for research and operations for the Florida Department of Citrus.