



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News

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Editors: Nathan Johannig & Bronwyn Aly

A newsletter to provide timely, research-based information that commercial fruit & vegetable growers can apply to benefit their farming operations.

Address any questions or comments regarding this newsletter to the individual authors listed after each article or to its editors, Nathan Johannig, 618-939-3434, njohann@illinois.edu or Bronwyn Aly 618-695-6060, baly@illinois.edu. The *Illinois Fruit and Vegetable News* is available on the web at: <http://ipm.illinois.edu/ifvn/>. To receive or be removed from email notification of new postings of this newsletter, contact Nathan Johannig or Bronwyn Aly at the phone numbers or email addresses above.

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Upcoming Programs

See the **University of Illinois Extension Local Food Systems and Small Farms Team’s** website at:

<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/smallfarm/> and the calendar of events at

<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/units/calendar.cfm?UnitID=629>.

- **2021 Small Farms Winter Webinar Series, Thursdays starting at noon, from January 21 - March 25, 2021.** Plan to spend your lunch hours learning more about local food and small farm related topics this coming year. If you still need to register, follow this link [Winter Webinar Registration](#) .
- **Backyard Greenhouse Basics, April 7, 2021, 1:30pm, Virtual program.** Join Extension Educator Katie Bell as she explains the benefits of having a backyard greenhouse, and tips to get your greenhouse ready for the planting season. Master Gardener will lead a short seed starting activity following the presentation. To register visit <https://web.extension.illinois.edu/registration/?RegistrationID=23154>. For more information please contact Christiana Lueking at lueking@illinois.edu, (618-548-1446) or Katie Bell at klbell@illinois.edu, (618-687-1727)

- **2021 Southern Illinois Summer Twilight Meeting Series, 3rd Monday evening May-August.** After a year off, plans are underway to host **IN-PERSON** twilight meetings across southern Illinois during the 2021 growing season. Be on the lookout for registration information in next month's issue of IFVN.

News & Announcements

M-CERF Illinois Producer Survey

University of Illinois Extension Cook County is collaborating with researchers from Illinois Institute of Technology and DePaul University, who are mapping the contributions of local farmers and food producers within a 300 mile radius of Chicagoland. Other partners include Chicago Food Policy Action Council and the Illinois Stewardship Alliance.

The survey is designed to understand what types of “good food” practices local farmers are already doing and the benefits and challenges of implementing such practices. “Good food” practices relate to safety, nutrition, environment, labor, animal welfare and local economy, and are increasingly in demand by institutional and retail customers.

Individual response will be CONFIDENTIAL and only the aggregated results will be shared with participants and stakeholders. Farmers will be able to see how they compare to their peers across the region. Other stakeholders will use the results to inform outreach and training to enable more local farmers to participate in “good food” purchasing contracts with Chicago and Cook County institutions, as well as sell to food hubs and aggregators interested in such practices.

As a token of appreciation for farmers time and willingness to share information, a \$20 gift card will be offered to the first 200 farmers who complete the survey. **If you are a farmer (urban or rural) within a 300 mile radius of Chicago [please click this link to participate](#).**

Kathryn Pereira (773-233-2900; kpereira@illinois.edu)

Midwest Farmers ‘Good Food’ Survey

We are reaching out to you as a key member of the Illinois farming community and an important contributor to our regional food systems.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how critical local farming is to the resilience of our regional food systems. We are a team of researchers from the Illinois Institute of Technology, DePaul University, and Chicago Food Policy Action Council who are mapping the contributions of local farmers and food producers to the Chicagoland food system. Through our work, we hope to identify new market opportunities and sales channels for locally produced food from businesses like yours.

We would greatly appreciate it if you could take 10 minutes to [complete a survey](#) to understand what “**Good Food**” practices farmers, like you, are employing and the challenges you face.



As a token of appreciation for your time, we are offering a \$20 gift card to the first 200 people who complete the survey.

Your individual response will be **CONFIDENTIAL** and only the aggregated analysis will be shared with participants and other stakeholders. Farmers will be able to see how they compare to their peers across the region. Other stakeholders will use these results to inform outreach, training and other activities to enable more local farmers to participate in “good food” purchasing contracts. More details can be found in the survey itself. For further information or questions contact Dr. Weslyne Ashton (washton@iit.edu or 312-906-6517)

Kathryn Pereira (773-233-2900; kpereira@illinois.edu)

Building a Farm-to-Foodbank Program Together: Tell Us What Can Work In Illinois

We have a unique opportunity to identify and build a long-term market and infrastructure where Illinois farmers can supply and grow food directly for Illinois foodbanks. Tell us what might work in Illinois: local conditions, challenges, opportunities, and barriers. We need input from specialty crop farmers, livestock farmers, dairy farmers, and grain farmers.

[Illinois Specialty Growers Association, Illinois Farm Bureau, Feeding Illinois, and the University of Illinois Prairie Research Institute have begun a Farm to Food Bank Feasibility Study.](#) During COVID-19, you witnessed the importance of the USDA Farms to Families Food Box Program which purchased food products from farmers, worked with distributors to package food into family-size boxes, and transported food to food banks for those in need. This program showed that food banks purchasing directly from farms helps increase food access and farm profitability.

[Take the 8-10 minute survey at http://go.illinois.edu/farm2foodbanksurvey](http://go.illinois.edu/farm2foodbanksurvey) by March 30. After the surveys are collected, the University of Illinois will engage groups of farmers for focus groups to learn more.

For more information or if you prefer a printed survey, please contact Sharon Dodd, Sdodd@ilfb.org or Raghela Scavuzzo, Rscavuzzo@ilfb.org.

Grower Survey to Assess Herbicide Drift Damage in the North Central U.S.

This is a reminder to participate in the current herbicide drift damage survey. The study seeks to document the frequency, severity, management, and economic impact of drift damage among specialty crop growers in the North Central U.S.

If you haven't already done so, please take the time right now to complete this survey at go.osu.edu/drift6.

The survey should take 5-20 minutes depending on your personal experience with herbicide drift. Results will help document needs for related research, education, or policy review around herbicide drift and drift management. More information at go.osu.edu/ipm-drift.

Thank you to those who have already participated!



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New Discovering Resilience Workshop for Farmers in April

Are you dreaming about hosting a farm event again, now that Spring is here? As the pandemic fades, many farmers are looking forward to gathering on their farm again with customers and neighbors for food, fun, and swapping stories. I know I am!

Before sending out the invitations, it's important to think about the legal implications.

- What if someone is injured?
- How does this affect taxes and reporting?
- What are my responsibilities to guests with disabilities?
- Should I be adding this to my insurance?
-

Farm Commons has answers. Make sure your farm is ready for the jump start of another season by signing up for Discovering Resilience, our online workshop for farmers nationwide on [Tuesday evenings](#) in April. There's still plenty of time to fit it in around seeding and fence repair- you'll be thankful for the added peace of mind this summer when you have the legal knowledge and skills you need to resolve key legal vulnerabilities on your farm.

Not sure if Discovering Resilience is right for you? Get a taste of what you have to gain by checking out our [free tip sheet on sorting out the basics](#) of agritourism legal risks! Also, check out our tip sheet on [farm insurance](#), as it's the primary way to address the legal risk of liability for on-farm events.

[Full details for Discovering Resilience are here](#)- it's just \$49 for the whole course. These workshops are supported by grant funding, which is what makes them so affordable. Just remember to sign up before April 1st!

For more information contact Rachel Armstrong at Farm Commons: rarmstrong@farmcommons.org

Regional Reports

From northern Illinois... We wrapped up our 25th Annual Stateline Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference the end of February. Over 50 farms from five different states representing 29 counties participated in our program this year. Held in 5 sessions over a 3-week period, the sessions included new topics we have not covered before such as basics of hard cider, pumpkin varieties, and high tunnel production. Presenters for these sessions were Carla Snyder of Penn State Extension and U of I Educators, Nathan Johanning and Bronwyn Aly. We were also joined by Drs. Babadoost and Athey who covered those yearly updates on insect and disease management in specialty crops. Growers noted through this conference that they plan to “have a more successful spray program for pumpkin diseases and insects”, “do more weed control”, “pay more attention to detail”, etc.

We were pleased to be able to offer the Stateline Fruit and Vegetable Growers Conference this year in a format that would allow growers who were unable to attend to still be able to access this valuable information - especially management recommendations. These recorded sessions can be found on YouTube by visiting this link: go.illinois.edu/Stateline2021YouTube

Grant McCarty (815-235-4125; gmcarty@illinois.edu) & Sarah Farley (847-223-8627; sfarley@illinois.edu)

From southwestern Illinois (Waterloo)... It's a little soggy in southwestern Illinois. We have had over 3" of rain across the last week with many cloudy, cool days to go with it. Happily, at the end of the week, the sun has come out and the weekend is predicted to stay dry. There are more rain chances later next week. Although we saw a little frost and morning lows in the 30s the last few days, highs have mainly been in the 50s and 60s lately and the forecast shows that continuing.

Out in the field, it is starting to look a little more like spring every day. Overwintering cover crops like clovers and cereal rye are really starting to take off. Think about how you are going to manage the cover crops in the coming weeks, especially if you plan to get in the field soon to do tillage or early plantings. Prior to this rain we did have a nice dry period which allowed for some field work. At home on the farm I was able to do some primary tillage and we got in some early plantings of early cool season vegetables. Fruit crops are just starting to wake up from dormancy but that will change soon as spring weather continues. I have been reviewing soil samples from last fall looking at how I am going to plan my amendments on fields. Hopefully the first month of spring will be kind to us giving us some nice balances of dry for field work along with some needed rain to keep soil moisture going into the heat of summer.

If you are interested in more details of our pumpkin variety trial results from 2020, visit <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/mwvtr/34/> to see the Midwest Vegetable Variety Trial Report for the full trial report with pictures.

Nathan Johanning (618-939-3434; njohann@illinois.edu)

From southern Illinois (Murphysboro)... Spring is Springing here in Murphysboro! We have experienced some very warm days in the high 60's, and we only have a few more nights forecasted to be in the low 20's. We have also received quite a bit of rain over the last few days and the ground is pretty saturated.

Production in the high tunnel is starting to ramp up. Currently we are growing kale, buttercrunch lettuce, and spinach in the raised beds. We also seeded an oat cover crop in late February inside the tunnel, this will be terminated using solarization to prepare for the transplanting of other crops later this spring. Peas, swiss chard, onions, various types of lettuce, and brussels sprouts have been started on the heat mat and should be ready for transplanting soon.



Lettuce growing in the Jackson Co. High Tunnel (left) and transplants started on the heat mats (right). Photos: K. Bell.

Outside of the high tunnel, the blackberry brambles were pruned in late February to remove last year's canes. They are starting to put on some green leaves and the blueberry bush has produced some buds.

The asparagus field was sprayed at the beginning of March with a burndown to remove any weeds that came up and to prevent some of the more problematic weeds before they emerge.

All in all, we are getting ready for a busy growing season here in Jackson county, Happy Spring everyone!

Katie Bell (618-687-1727; klbell@illinois.edu)

From Dixon Springs Ag Center... What a difference a month can make, especially when we are transitioning into the next season. The last week or so has brought quite a bit of rain, with flash flooding and standing water in low lying areas and saturated soils. The raspberries that have overwintered in the hydroponic tunnel have broken dormancy, with new cane growth and leaf buds breaking. The 'Joan J' and 'Double Gold' varieties are a bit further along than the two black raspberry varieties, 'Bristol' and 'Niwot'. Bare root strawberry plants came in last month and were started in the greenhouse. The plants were set out in the vertical stacks last week and blooms are already open. Each stack will hold 20 plants (4 plants per level, 5 levels high). There will be two varieties in the stacks this year, 'Monterey' and 'Sweet Anne' and 3 different substrate mixes: perlite, 50/50 perlite/coco coir, and 50/25/25 perlite, coco coir, peat moss.



Strawberries being grown hydroponically in vertical stack system at DSAC (left) and hydroponic raspberries greening up after being overwintered in the high tunnel (right). Photos by B. Aly.

The spinach, kale and carrot plots in the winter vegetable research plots have put on a lot of new growth in the last couple of weeks, with harvests needing to be done every 4 days on the spinach and kale. The lettuce from the November planted plots was harvested two weeks ago and showed quite a bit of winter damage from last month's extreme cold temperatures. The December planted carrots are finally showing new growth after being very slow to germinate and stalled with one true leaf emerged. Early October planted carrots are about 7-10 days from harvest. Demonstration plots of tomatoes at different planting dates have been established, with the first plant date of March 15th going in the ground this past Monday. Six plants each of 'Mountain Gem' and 'Red Mountain', determinate hybrid slicing tomato varieties, will be planted every two weeks from March 15 through May 1.



Spinach and kale plots from the winter vegetable high tunnel production research trial at DSAC (left) and December seeded carrots are starting to put on new growth in the high tunnel (right). Photos by B. Aly.

Bronwyn Aly (618-382-2662; baly@illinois.edu)

Fruit & Vegetable Production & Pest Management

Weather & Climate Summary: A Wild February Ended an Otherwise Mild Winter

Who ordered winter? The cold season came with a vengeance in February, bringing bitter cold and snow across the state. The statewide average February temperature was 20.7 degrees, 10.4 degrees below the 1991–2020 average and the 11th coldest on record going back to 1895. Statewide average total February precipitation was 1.59 inches, 0.51 inches below the 1991–2020 average and tied for the 55th driest on record going back to 1895.

The extreme cold in February broke 218 daily low maximum temperature records and 81 daily low minimum temperature records at stations around Illinois, from Galena to Cairo. No February low maximum and minimum temperature records were broken last month. However, among stations with at least 30-year records, last month was the coldest February on record in Dixon, Du Quoin, Olmsted, Carmi, and Mt. Vernon. Some of the most extreme observed temperatures include -21 degrees in Altona and Mt. Carroll, -17 in Aurora, and -15 in Moline.

As the maps below show, February average temperatures ranged from the low teens in northwest Illinois to the high 20s in southern Illinois, which was between 8 and 14 degrees below the 1981–2010 normal (Figure 1). The two-week stretch during February 6–20 exhibited temperatures between 18 and 25 degrees below the 1981–2010 normal across the state.

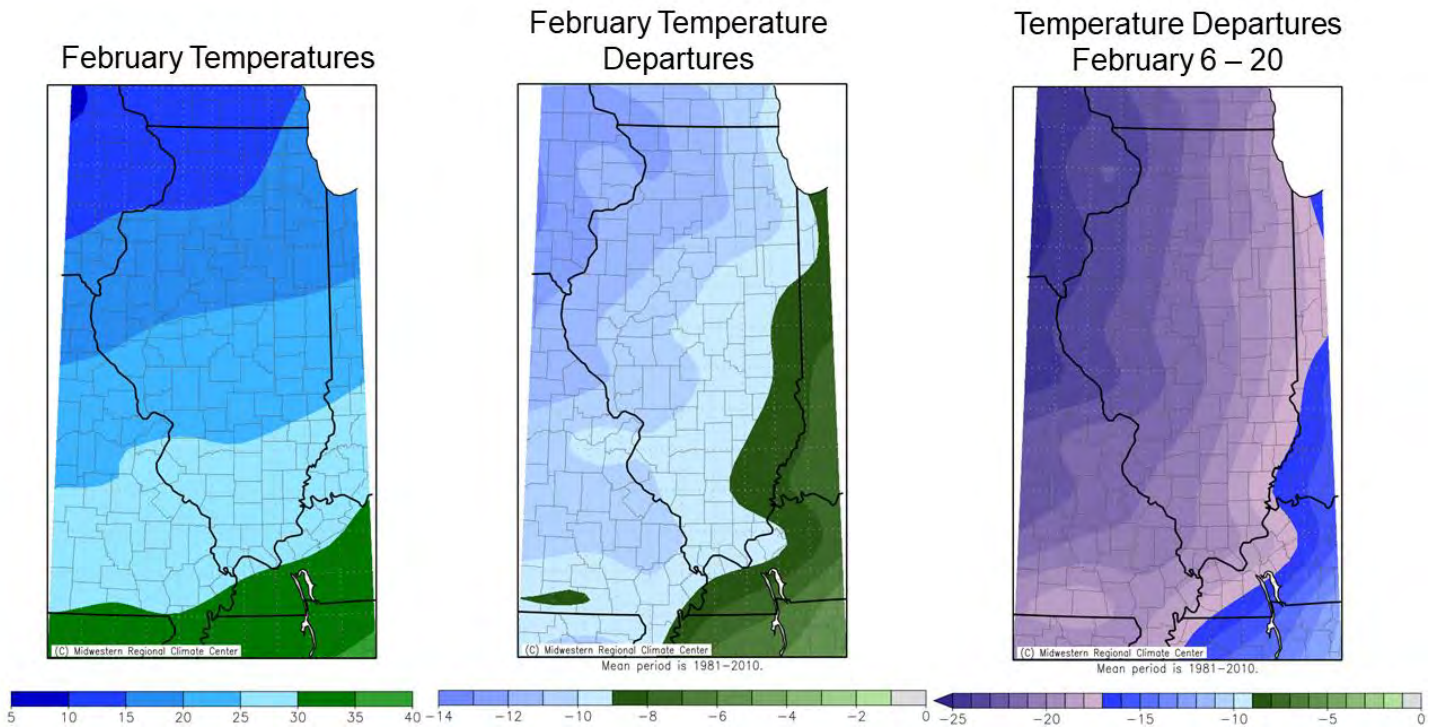


Figure 1. February average temperature (left) and departure from the 1981–2010 normal (middle). Right map shows average temperature departures between February 6 and 20.

February propelled the 2020–21 winter season temperatures below the 1981–2010 normal, despite a warmer than normal January and December. Winter average temperatures ranged from the high teens in northern Illinois to the high 30s in southern Illinois, between 0 and 4 degrees below normal.

The maps below show February total snowfall ranged from 8 inches in southwest Illinois to over 30 inches in northeast Illinois, between 5 and 15 inches above the 1981–2010 normal (Fig. 2). The incredibly snowy month pushed winter season totals above normal across most of the state.

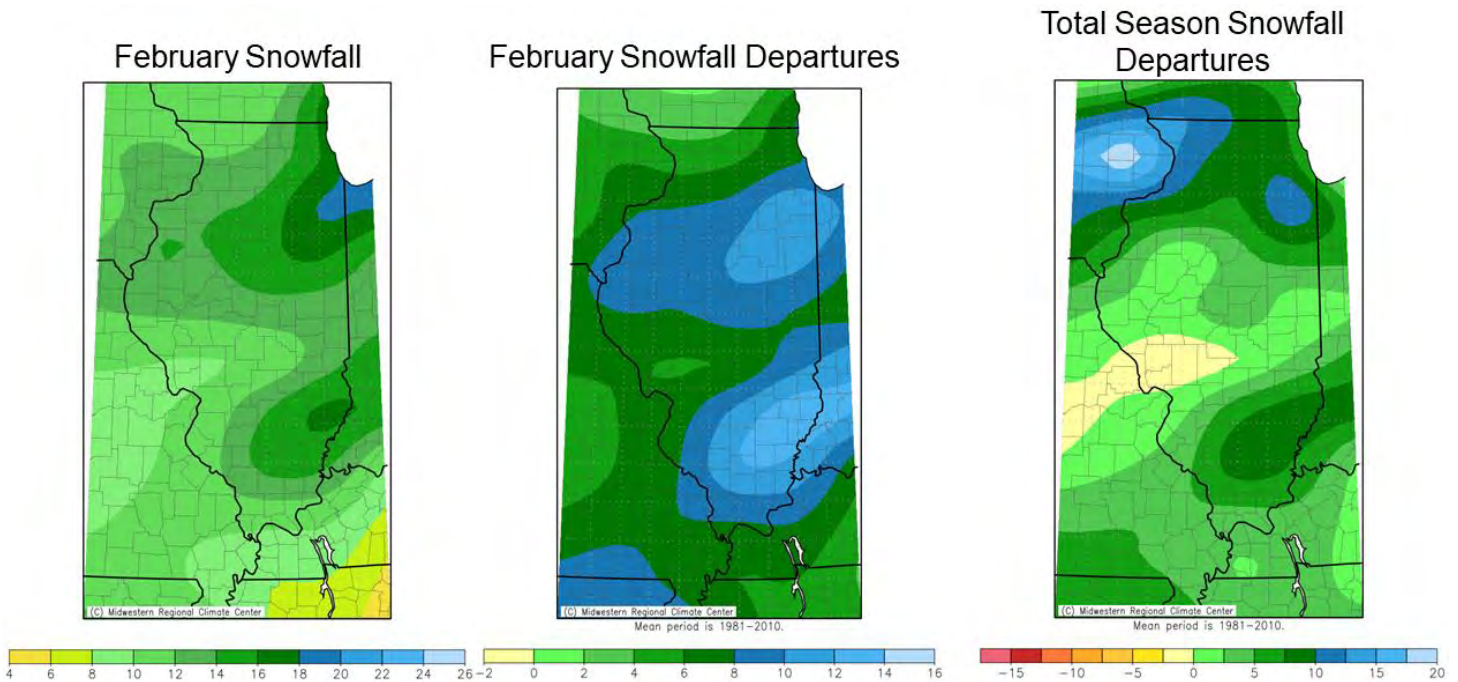


Figure 2. Maps show total February snowfall (left) and departure from 1981-2010 normal (middle). The right map shows total winter season snowfall departures from normal. All maps are in units of inches.

Combined with drier than average months in January and December, most parts of the state experienced a winter season that was one-half inch to three inches drier than normal.

Outlooks

Outlooks for the latter half of March show highest odds of near to slightly above normal temperatures and precipitation (Figure 3). Longer-term outlooks for April and May continue to show strongly elevated chances of warmer than normal conditions, with slightly wetter than normal conditions indicated.

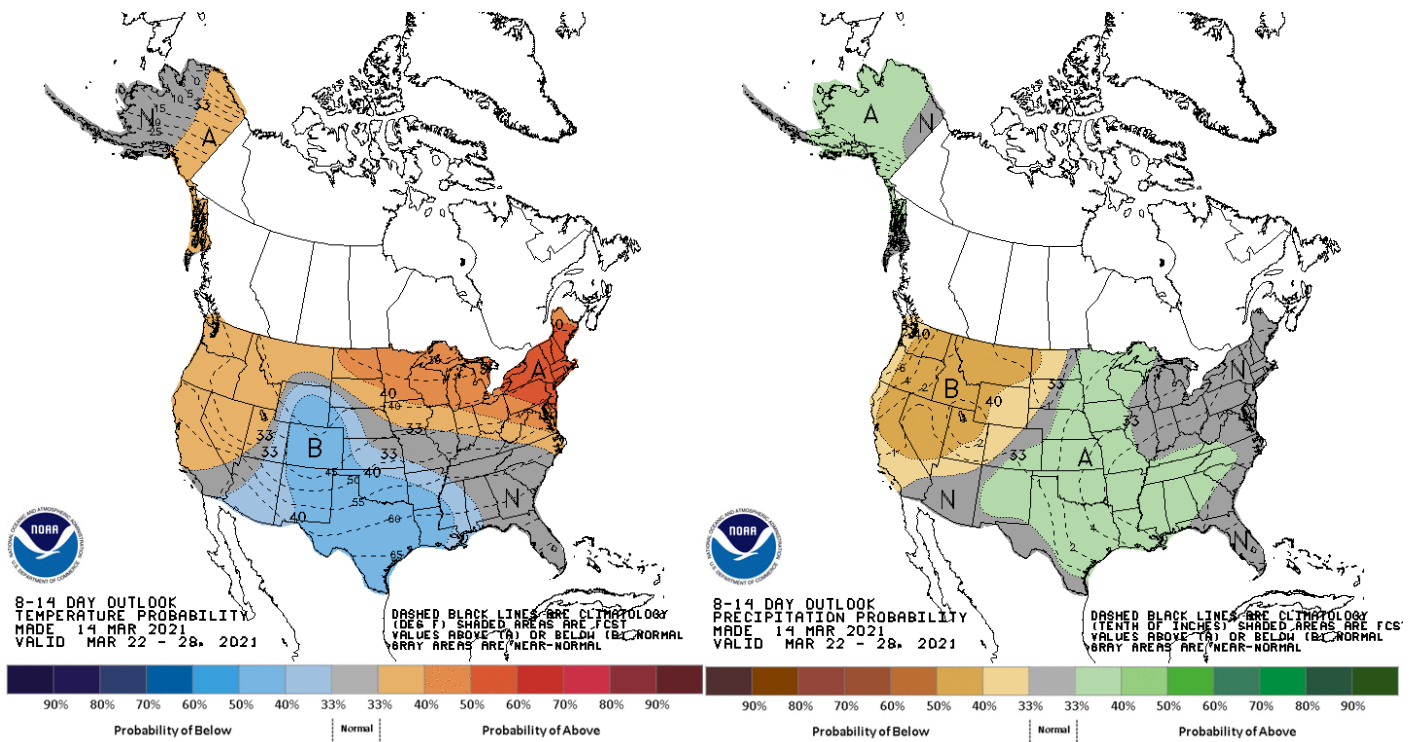


Figure 3. Maps show temperature (left) and precipitation (right) outlooks for the last week of March.

Trent Ford, Illinois State Climatologist (217-244-1330; twford@illinois.edu)

Less Seriously... <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/spring>

“It’s spring fever. That is what the name of it is. And when you’ve got it, you want—oh, you don’t quite know what it is you do want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache, you want it so!”

— Mark Twain

“If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant: if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome.”

[*Meditations Divine and Moral*]

— Anne Bradstreet, [The Works of Anne Bradstreet](#)

“In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt.”

— Margaret Atwood, [Bluebeard's Egg](#)

“Spring is the time of plans and projects.”

— Leo Tolstoy, [Anna Karenina](#)

“That is one good thing about this world...there are always sure to be more springs.”

— L.M. Montgomery, [Anne of Avonlea](#)

“I enjoy the spring more than the autumn now. One does, I think, as one gets older.”

— Virginia Woolf, [Jacob's Room](#)

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