The National Climate Program Act of 1978

Growers of semi-hardy desert plants in the Southwestern United States eventually become aware of the inevitable climatic rhythms that result in uniform yearly increments of good plant growth and development followed all too often by a brief but disastrous near killing freeze. This sequence is a consequence of the position of the North American deserts in a zone of transition between the tropics and the mid-latitude temperate belt of westerlies. With adequate comprehension of these cycles, growers can take steps to prevent loss from severe weather. Recently the federal government initiated a program which may eventually produce long-range weather forecasts from climatological data to supplement the short-range predicitions made by routine meterorological procedures.

During September, 1978, President Carter signed Public Law 95-367, establishing a National Climate Program Office in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA.) This office will present a final five-year plan of operations by September 17, 1979. The law resulted from the need seen by Congress for obtaining a better understanding of the long-range fluctuations of climate which have resulted in record droughts and cold winters in the nation in recent years.

Strangely, in 1973, NOAA had decided to abolish its climatology program, resulting in the transfer of programs from the federal government to the fifty states. As an example of this transition, the Arizona State Board of Regents established a Laboratory of Climatology at Arizona State University to continue the Arizona work which had been sponsored by the federal government. Since the new 1978 legislation provides for inter-governmental programs, the State Climatologists for the fifty states have recommended that cooperation among the states and with the federal government take place to provide for uniform terminology and direct computer interconnection. If this is incorporated into the national plan, it is hoped that the network of interactive computers could provide analyses of destructive storms and droughts on a near-term enough basis to be of practical help to the nation. The new law tends to recognize climatology as of clear national vital importance aside from its local historical value.

Meteorologists who study current weather conditions use meteorological principles to predict the weather on a day to day basis. Climatologists, on the other hand, summarize by statistical measures the various rhythms and regularities of temperature, rainfall and other phenomena over a longer period

of time. The type of program which hopefully will emerge from the 1978 law, while clearly climatological in character, should provide much needed guidance for plant growers. Ample understanding could favorably alter the risk-reward equation for desert growers.