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I'm amazed how quickly the weather can change. In a recent article I was saying how warm it was. Things have changed very quickly. There is one factor on our side however. If we didn't have climatic warming, imagine how cold it would be.

Figure 1 shows how dramatic the people in Central Otago have had it. A record warm August, followed by a bitterly cold October. The warm August was a 1 in 20 year event and the cool October a 1 in 10 year event. Quite rare.

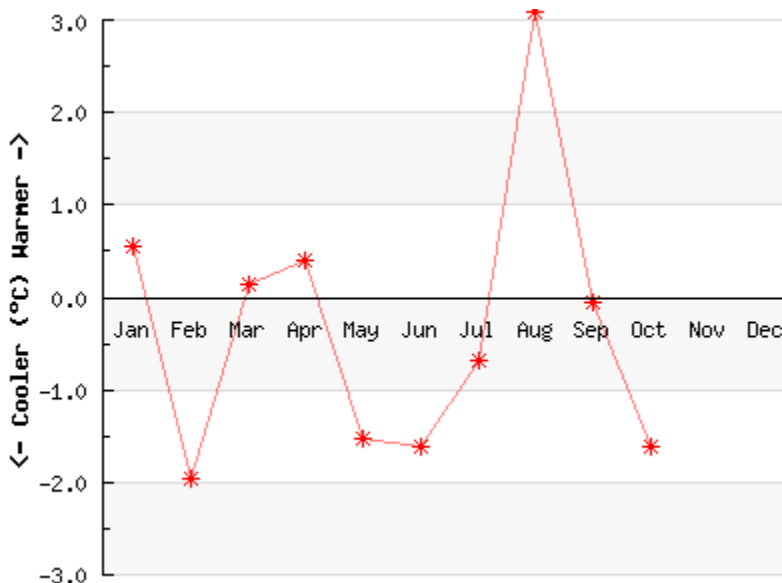


Figure 1 : Temperature Comparison in Central Otago

This situation is the same around the country but not so pronounced. A summary is presented in table 1 and table 2. Temperatures were warm in August but cool in October. In addition to this it has been very wet in September and October except in Central Otago. Both tables show how variable New Zealand's oceanic climate can be.

Forecasting medium term weather patterns is a guess at best. We recently decided to test some of these forecast. We had interesting results. The same forecaster sent out two opposing forecasts. One saying it would be warmer than usual while the other said it would be cooler. Of course they were correct. All you need to do is highlight the version that fits the facts. The other situation was that the forecast was unintelligible because of the language used. The moral of story is be careful what you read and believe. Also keep it simple. People don't care how you got there, just the result.

Table 1 : Winter Temperatures Around NZ Shown as Degrees Above or Below Normal

Region	May	June	July	August	September	October
Northland	-2.05	-1.13	-0.50	1.54	0.22	-0.46
Waikato	-2.03	-2.32	-0.42	1.11	-0.34	-0.99
Bay of Plenty	-2.39	-1.58	-0.61	1.26	-0.08	-0.78
Poverty Bay	-1.85	-1.16	-0.50	0.90	0.09	-1.24
Hawkes Bay	-1.19	-1.29	-0.58	0.81	-0.71	-1.36
Marlborough	-2.53	-2.19	-1.05	1.78	-0.93	-1.48
Nelson	-2.39	-1.16	-0.84	1.11	-1.1	-1.11
Canterbury	-2.16	-0.86	-1.04	1.70	-0.14	-1.61
Central Otago	-1.52	-1.61	-0.67	2.98	-0.05	-1.61



Table 1 : National Rainfall shown as % of Usual Amount

Region	May	June	July	August	September	October
Northland	118	144	31	31	222	96
Waikato	128	111	112	113	183	134
Bay of Plenty	84	40	80	156	102	95
Poverty Bay	151	158	149	89	82	168
Hawkes Bay	84	184	106	122	165	255
Marlborough	59	136	60	136	122	165
Nelson	35	113	74	162	114	125
Canterbury	332	32	55	67	52	205
Central Otago	139	10	139	184	73	73

That reminds me, I recently predicted rain on August 15th. Guess what, it rained 7.5 mm at Havelock North in Hawkes Bay. So far I'm 100 percent accurate and I guessed. Another moral "Don't get sucked in!" Seasonal forecast are not very accurate.

On a more serious note the only thing in our favour for forecasting medium term weather patterns. The El Nino Southern Oscillation Index. That index is currently neutral so we can expect this to have very little impact on New Zealand weather patterns. So what will happen this season is guesswork. Sorry guys but that's the truth. I challenge anyone to prove me wrong.

All of this information comes from HortPlus Metwatch Online. You can follow the progress of the season if you want to. This may help with your orchard management decisions. We are happy to give any grower a free trial. Just send us an email and we will set you up. Also if you visit www.hortplus.com you will see that we sell temperature loggers. These loggers are ideal for frost monitoring on your property at this time of year and they are currently on special. Ask Lesley about the reduced cost.