Frost damage to fruit, corn, may be widespread

BY LINDA GALLAGHER

ATWOOD—The verdict’s not quite in yet, but it doesn’t look good.

And as the once fragrant blossoms of cherries, apples, and even strawberries slowly turned brown in the aftermath of last Wednesday’s hard freeze, Antrim County’s fruit farmers became even grimmer in their predictions about this year’s crop.

“It’s not good,” said Royal Farms’ Sara McGuire. “We’re not quite sure yet how bad we were hit,” the Atwood resident said. “But we do know that the tart cherries were hit pretty hard, and that’s 50%, or maybe a bit more, of our total crop.”

“Doh, and our apricots—well, I’m not sure,” she said.

Just before dawn, when temperatures are always lowest, the thermometer read just 27 degrees at Royal Farms, McGuire noted, who added that her husband Patrick was out all night in the orchards, as most fruit farmers were, blowing a combination of water and air, which helps to keep cold air from settling on the trees.

If reports from our offices warrant it, the governor may make a disaster declaration,” she said.

In that event would any of Antrim’s farmers be eligible for low interest government loans. “But only for farmers who have crop loss insurance,” Kozlowski said. “Unfortunately, many farmers in this area don’t have that insurance. They’re taking a real gamble.”

But that, said Sara McGuire, echoing the words of everyone she spoke to, is the risk you take as a farmer. “You just have to take what Mother Nature gives you,” she said. “And keep on going.”