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MANY VEGETABLE FARMS FLOODED BUT PLENTY OF SAFE LOCAL PRODUCE AVAILABLE

Flooding caused by hurricane Irene led to extensive damage to crops, fields and equipment on farms all across Vermont. Unlike the flooding this past spring, or after storms in recent years, these floods affected the entire state rather than a few counties. From the Connecticut River to the Lamoille River, from the Otter Creek to the White River, farms had water come up to the 100-year flood level and in some cases the 500-year flood level.

Vegetable farms were especially hard hit because they are commonly located on the bottom lands by rivers and streams. That's where the soil there tends to be fertile and flat, and irrigation water is readily available. Reports collected to date from several dozen vegetable farms throughout Vermont indicate losses approaching \$2 million.

Since vegetable crops are sold for direct human consumption, exposure to dirty flood water renders them unsalable, and they have to be plowed in, whereas perennial crops like hay can be left in place to regrow long after flood waters recede. Vegetable farmers have been well informed by University of Vermont Extension about the practices they should follow to assure food safety. As a result, farmers have been busy plowing under soiled crops while harvesting those that were not affected.

The good news is that most vegetable farms are located above the areas that were flooded. In addition, the majority of farms that experienced flooding also have some fields that were not flooded. The result is that there is a lot of fresh, safe produce available. In fact, this is the time of year that the harvest of vegetables is at its peak, with everything from vine-ripened tomatoes to fresh-dug potatoes and just-harvested winter squash being available. Consumers can select from a wide range of fresh, healthy and safe local vegetables, despite the fact that many farms lost some of their crops.

Farmers that did experience losses are urged to report these to the USDA Farm Service Agency in order to be eligible to receive disaster assistance; call (802) 658-2803 for more information. Some farmers had especially large losses, including a few smaller operations that saw raging rivers completely destroy their farm fields. These farmers will likely need extra assistance to help them stay in business. Several philanthropic efforts have been established around the state to provide grants, as well as interest-free loans to affected farmers. Donations from consumers will allow these efforts to provide the necessary support to our local farmers during a time of crisis.

Funds for farm disaster relief include: The Vermont Community Foundation, which will be making grants to support farms of any size that have sustained losses, see: <http://www.vermontcf.org/give-now/> or call 802-388-3355. The Vermont Farm Fund will be offering small, zero-interest loans to farmers, see: <http://hardwickagriculture.org/donate.html> or call 802-472-5840. NOFA-Vermont's Farmer Emergency Fund assists organic farmers with grants and zero-interest loans, see: <http://nofavt.org/programs/farm-financial-resources/farmer-emergency-fund> or call 802-434-4122. The Intervale Farmers Recover Fund, see: <http://www.intervale.org> or call 802-660-0440.

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