



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – January 31, 2017
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www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry

RENEW YOUR VVBGA MEMBERSHIP TODAY – OR PAY \$10 MORE

2017 Vermont Vegetable and Berry Grower Assn. member dues for 2017 are \$35 per farm, increasing to \$45 after January 31. Non-members will soon get removed from the listserv. Join and/or donate to support research and extension at <https://2017vbgga.eventbrite.com>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Starksboro) Field report from a young farmer! The biggest excitement around here has been the recent hire of our first full time employee, who will bring us up to 1.5 employees for the 2017 season. This is our first winter growing in unheated tunnels (32' x 96'), which has had quite the learning curve. We lost our lettuce to a couple different mildews early on, we have accidentally cooked and frozen the plants a few too many times, and we've been waging a battle against voles in the spinach beds. The voles took out a whole bed of spinach in a couple of days, so we bought every type of trap the local hardware store had to offer and baited them with everything we could think of. Best method has been placing an upside-down 2' length of rain gutter at their hole entries, then putting one of those black plastic "easy set" mouse traps inside the gutter. Best bait has been raspberries. 20-something voles later we are at least a little bit ahead of them and are planning a gravel perimeter around the tunnels for next year. We have also been super happy with switching our AC-cooled/Coolbot walk-in over to a heated space for the winter. We used the thermostat that Coolbot recommends and a tiny space heater and it has held tight at 36F all winter. There has been a good amount of interest in fresh produce this time of year, so I'm looking forward to tackling winter greens again next season.

(Shrewsbury) Evening Song Farm. Still have plenty of roots and cabbage in storage, but greens production has slowed down, bringing with it the seasonal dip in sales through farmer's market and local restaurants/co-ops. Looking to learn more about how to boost greens production for January/February to be able to provide more winter work for employees and hopefully retain employees for longer stretches of time.

We're considering ground heat, low hoops or other simple structures to extend late fall harvest and stockpile more greens for longer in the tunnels, and shifting winter greens production towards more profitable greens. I'd love to put up another tunnel, but we've seen a dramatic increase in runoff on our sloping fields with every structure we've put up: an inch of rain on one of our 30' x 148' tunnels sheds over 2,500 gallons of water!

(Westminster West) Up and running again, what happened to down time! First tomato seedlings for grafting are ready to prick out and early seeded strawberries ready as well. Still putting finishing touches on this year's master plan and trimming our offerings in order to focus on the better and more profitable crops. Trying to line up additional staff to fill out the crews. Getting harder and harder to get staff; labor pool dried up, hard to know what's going on. Continuing attending seminars and workshops while we still have time and look forward to the winter NOFA conference later in Feb. I'm starting Spanish lessons because, hey you never know!

(Dummerston) High tunnel greens are hanging on despite having lost some outer leaves during the cold snaps and suffered a little vole damage lately. I decided not to use row covers in the tunnel at all this year because it's not always practical for me to get out there and put them on and remove them at the right times. So far it seems to be working out. Some lost foliage due to cold is balanced out by less disease and bolting due to condensation and warmth under covers when the sun is out. I'm still harvesting a little kale and bok choy for the winter market; I appreciate Jon Cohen telling me to raise prices. And I'm waiting for spinach and mustards to grow back. What little winter squash I had left has suddenly all turned moldy. But carrots and parsnips are storing well in the root cellar. I'm not sure I'll be able to sell all the carrots by spring though. So I've added a new product for the market: carrot juice.

(Plainfield NH) Breaking down seed orders, sorting out inventory, taking vegetative cuttings, seeding ornamentals and tomatoes for grafting are the things we are attended to this time of the year. A lot of meetings to be crammed in, both on farm as well as off farm. Repairing and looking at small machines that were neglected during the fall packout and harvest. We are trying to cover for each other in order to get vacations in amongst the full timers. Should it continue to stay seasonally warm, we will try to take advantage of the small snowpack and start pruning blues. Quite a lot of little things to attend to before we really take off end of February.

(Westfield) There is only spinach left in the high tunnel. There is no disease so far, but it is hard to keep the humidity down with the swinging temperatures. On a warm day we keep cleaning and preparing the greenhouses for the next crops, but we are not in a rush yet. We are mostly doing our fire wood and planning for this coming season.

(Fairfax) Root crop sales are very strong. Most crops are holding up well in storage. Nectar (a Nantes variety) is holding very well in storage. A very uniform carrot with excellent flavor.

(Durham CT) I've taken a 'later in life' approach to winter growing. There are so many greens that will do well if you take care of them by covering and recovering like kale, lettuce, and mustard, however, this winter's approach is working well for me: late plantings and no cover. Mostly spinach and claytonia, but on the side, a late planting of curly kale that has done well uncovered in the house all winter. I wish there was more of that right now, it looks great. Without row cover, growth is slower, but there is no moisture to promote spinach downy mildew. I'm growing Gazelle, which is downy mildew resistant. After planting late (in late October) crops grew very slowly--and I mean slowly! Since we've reached the magic period of 10 hours of daylight, they've really taken off. Some of the rows harvested in Mid-December were culled and reculled for chickweed and they are now almost ready to be harvested again. It isn't a lot of variety, compared to all the crops I used to grow, but it's beautiful and extra tasty. Not having to put row cover on and off every day suits my new way of being just 'a tad older'.

(Argyle NY) Pleasant Valley Farm. These past couple of weeks have been so warm it's been like a vacation! No row covers in our three high tunnels on the winter greens till tonight. Regrowth is on its way and we got a watering in with our drip and overhead systems. Spinach is still too small for much harvesting due to seeding 7 days later than normal (Oct. 7) and we are watching for downy mildew infection. Of the 15 spinach varieties we are growing only 5 do not have the disease: Space, Escalade, Whale, Spargo, Carmel and Emperor, most of which are no longer available. We think it is race 14 and hopefully lab testing will determine that. We are using Double Nickel on it and will report its effectiveness.

With this January thaw, the frost in the ground is gone, so on to digging parsnips for markets, for the first time ever in January I think. It was a great VVBGA conference in Lake Morey, and we just finished a conference in Michigan, visiting some inspirational farms there as well. We continue to seed in the greenhouse as we replace tunnel greens. A great new system for us is to seed the salad mix, mustards, etc. into the strip trays, grow them in the GH for a few weeks, then transplant the whole strips in rows in the tunnel. They mature much earlier and you are guaranteed a nice stand. Winter farmers' markets have been busy due to other farmers not having any winter greens. We're anxious for spring but also want snow to ski on!

SLIDE SHOWS POSTED FROM VVBGA ANNUAL MEETING AND COVER CROP CONFERENCE

Scroll to bottom of: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/?Page=proceedingslinks.html>

BOOST YOUR LABOR MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Join one or all four workshops in January and February to build farmers' skills in managing their labor force. Topics include hiring, motivating and training, employment law and leadership. This series will be offered in two locations: West Lebanon, NH and Portsmouth, NH. Co-sponsored by NOFA-VT & UNH Extension. More info and register at:

<http://nofavt.org/blog/farm-labor-management-developing-leadership-and-human-resource-management-skills>

UPDATE TO WORKER PROTECTION STANDARDS

The 1992 WPS regulation covers all agricultural establishments that apply pesticides, conventional and organic. The WPS has been revised; changes are outlined in the How to Comply manual at: <http://pesticideresources.org/wps/htc/>. A major change is that VT Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) staff can no longer provide one-on-one farm worker training as in the past. Only Certified Applicators (Private or Commercial) can train pesticide handlers and agricultural workers. Thus, farmers that apply any pesticides and employ any farm workers must now obtain Private Applicator Certification in order to train their own employees, as required. Resources are available to assist with such trainings, see:

http://agriculture.vermont.gov/pesticide_regulation/applicator_dealer_resources

To become a Certified Private Applicator, you must pass an exam. Exams are held every Wednesday in Montpelier, and once a month at 6 other locations statewide. See the link above for details. You should purchase and study the appropriate Core Manual ahead of time, see: <https://store.cornell.edu/pdf/order-form-pmep-manuals.pdf> and/or attend one of two day-long Pesticide Applicator Initial Certification and Trainings. The first training will take place in White River Junction VFW on Tuesday April 4th, with a second training in Burlington at the Robert Miller Community Center Wednesday on April 5th. The morning will be a review of the Core Manual, after which students take the exam to obtain their Private Applicators certificate. There will be a \$30.00 Registration fee, \$40 after March 21st, plus the \$25.00 private applicator certification fee. Stay tuned for on line registration links. VAAFAM is also willing to offer specific Private Applicator Certification Training to large groups of growers, should sufficient interest exist. Please make Mimi Arnstein mimiarstein@gmail.com aware of your interest and your location.

Family farms that only employ immediate family members, as defined in the How to Comply manual, are exempt from the WPS handler/worker training requirements. Though this exemption applies to many farms in Vermont, other aspects of the WPS will still apply. Please contact Annie Macmillan at the VAAF anne.macmillan@vermont.gov or 828-3479 for more information or clarification about which core manual to purchase.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

For details go to: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/?Page=meetlist.html>

Feb. 15. VT Tree Fruit Growers, Middlebury.

Feb. 18-19. NOFA-VT Winter Conference, Burlington.

March 2 or 3. Vegetable Farm Efficiency Intensive, Poultney or Craftsbury

March 6. Organic Strawberry Growers School, Fairlee