



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News –November 14, 2013
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Westminster West) Wow, is it almost over already? We finished cutting the turnip crop yesterday, 2,000 lbs. safely in our new Cool Bot walk in. Carrots in as well and a fine, tasty crop it is. Mulching the garlic crop with hay and remay, hope to see which is easier to do labor-wise. All the fields have really nice cover crops, well established. I never really relax until all the fields are covered and tucked in for the winter. Winter squash still selling strong and we should have enough for our stores thru Thanksgiving. Onions are sold out, already working on next year's plans for onions. Lots to be thankful for this year, good crops in the end. Built out our 40x80 storage and produce prep area, insulated the barn. New walk in. Good health and good cheer got us thru another trying season, aren't they all trying years? Switching to maintenance mode and building part of the season. So far the fall has been amazing, mostly making up for the wet early part of the year. After 40 plus years of doing this, still planning more expansion and new ways of utilizing this sweet old farm.

(Sudbury) The cold has finally arrived, let's hope it kills some bugs! Garlic, shallots and carrots are all under straw for the winter. We now enter our 'vacation period' where we evaluate the previous year and plan for the next; bring on the seed catalogs. We look forward to improving on our best year ever.

(Craftsbury) Finally, the very last of outdoor crops came in the door. Nice to have that done. From the first storage onion harvest in mid-August until now is 3 months of steady packing away. All in all, bountiful crops with potatoes as a real standout. Very strange result with storage cabbage this season: transplanted into perfect cover crop plowdown plenty early enough, crop looked great with beautiful big leaves, never sized worth a darn. It almost seemed like it had it too good and didn't realize it was supposed to grow a big head, but I think of that being more of an issue with fruiting plants rather than leafy greens. Onions also a bit of a debacle but I think more related to growing them in a swamp than anything else. Markets are strong, we're struggling to get everything packed and out the door.

(Montpelier) Just pulled the last of the leeks out of the ground before freeze up, which I am pretty sure is happening much earlier than the last 3 years. Some late savoy cabbage is out in the field along with Brussels sprouts for Thanksgiving market next weekend. Winter CSA starts next week. Greenhouses are planted with spinach but the warm October forced us to harvest pretty hard the whole month. The plants are well established but waiting to see what we will have for winter 'inventory'. We were cutting about 200 lbs. per week the whole month. One house is still down due to garden symphylans infestation. Not sure if we have figured out how to manage them or the soil just became cold enough that they migrated down for the winter. Have to wait until spring to find out. The latest round of plugs is establishing well. They won't be ready for harvest until late Feb.

(Williston) The season was good with increased yields mostly at the end of season. Last killing frost was not until mid-October which allowed harvest longer into the fall. Sales were steady and I could not produce enough hoophouse tomatoes to keep up with demand. This was first year I grew cherry tomatoes. Even with the looming scare of late blight and a visit from the dreaded hornworm I will be planting more next year replacing the cucumbers which were hit with striped cucumber beetle. Peppers and eggplant were a success too in hoophouse. Farmers' market sales seemed to be down this year with less attendance. Maybe just too many markets or other activities. I will be expanding to include more vegetables and culinary herbs. I invested in a Rain Flo mini layer this year which dramatically decreased my weed pressure. The produce was so much cleaner and easier to harvest. It was hard to pull out all the plants in hoophouse in early September to get ready for fall/winter season but worth it. The kale is producing nicely, scallions are being harvested, spinach is sizing up and cilantro is on its second cut. Chard is not growing as well so I may pull and replant with spinach. This is my first year growing veggies in hoophouse so it is a lot of trial and error. I had herbs there last season which just managed to overwinter them with not much production till April. Looking forward to attending the New England Vegetable and Fruit Conference in December with lots of great workshops.

(Fairfax) Sent in my FSMA comments this morning while waiting for some warm weather to finish carrot and beet harvesting. I want to believe in the democratic process but can't help to think that this rule is not going to end up well for us smaller farms in the Northeast. I can't help but keep thinking how less than 1% of food borne illness comes from produce (according to the CDC) and count the number of vegetable and fruit servings consumed in the country each year. The level of risk just doesn't seem to be there. My hope is it turns out well and we all do a better job with cleanliness and sanitation on of farms, and don't go broke trying to meet the guidelines. Back to washing carrots.

(Rochester) We were pleasantly surprised by how many raspberries we got from the fall-bearing varieties we planted in mid-May, the late killing frost helping with that. We can't say enough good things about Himbo Top--the fruit is big, has great color and flavor and is extremely productive. Similarly, Autumn Britten produces a big firm berry with a dark red color and good flavor and it has an upright habit (it's nice if you can get away without trellising fall bearers). But the canes are thorny and that might present a challenge once they are fully grown. Our farm honey also caught on with customers this year and has added a little to farm income. The blueberry season was not great for us, with frost, SWD and birds (crows joined in this year) all contributing to a modest yield.

(Wolcott) Still planting garlic in the snow and cold this first part of November. Garlic and seed garlic sales this year were strong. We had good year with large bulbs and no diseases, could be the sandy loam soils and heavy layer of mulch hay. This was our first year using grafted tomatoes. We planted half the high tunnel with Geronimo and the other half with Early Girl, Jet Star and cherry tomatoes. The grafted tomatoes came in a month earlier, lasted a month later, looked better, and had double the production, with less disease issues. We decided not to treat with copper. Our only issue the grafted tomatoes were inferior taste. Ideas for better tasting grafted varieties? Having tomatoes in northern VT until the end of October in an un-heated tunnel was a big plus. We decided to bag sweet potatoes next year even though there is a strong market for them here. We are just too far north, even with black plastic and row covers. If we do plant, it will be in the tunnels. Poor year for winter squash, melons, and pumpkins. Our winter tunnel greens are going strong with kale, spinach, and Asian greens.

(New Haven) We have put our fields to bed; our last pick was Oct 25. This was an OK year, but not the greatest. The wet spring really hurt us but our tomato and melon crop was the best to date, go figure. Tomato sales peaked during the first part of September, when we were moving, on average, 500 lbs. per day. Our pumpkin crop fell short by 25,000 lbs. Winter squash fell short as well. Glad to put this year in the record book and plan for next year.

(Londonderry) Almost single digits here this morning. Leeks, mustards and kale are brave under 3 layers of row cover. Have started to use extra metal hoops running length wise along the edge of beds to better protect edge rows. Sealed in until the next frost. Hoop house cherry toms still producing at half strength with low light. Propane set at 40 hardly runs, except for last night! Understory in house is sorrel, cress, arugula, cilantro, parsley, chard, amaranth, shun gi ku, daikon and Avignon radish. Drip irrigate with frost-free hydrant. This will produce through New Years for area restaurants and again in early spring before it goes to seed.

(Grand Isle) It is nice to finally slow down a bit and just attend to fall crops that are in storage. The garlic and tulips were planted before the recent cold snap and mulch will be on the strawberries soon. We experimented with broccoli varieties and kale is gaining in customer popularity each year. In July we seeded sorghum and winter rye seed together at the same time, with the aim of harvesting the sorghum in November for mulch, and overwintering the rye for soil fertility purposes. Fortunately the rye got a good start despite being an understory to the sorghum. It is a practice we will continue to do, as it means less time the soil is bare, and it is a labor time-saver with the seeder. We would love to automate our leek washing procedure, but as yet have not come up with a solution.

(Brattleboro) Spinach, baby lettuce, mustards, and head lettuce all growing beautifully in the high tunnel; a little too fast if you ask me, but we're trying to keep up with just our winter CSA share as an outlet. Our beet experiment of transplanting beets Sept 19 in the high tunnel is still progressing. The greens look great, the roots aren't doing much. Harvested kale outside this morning in 26 degrees, it held up great under one layer of remay. Trying to finish up some of the many infrastructure projects we've taken on this year at our new location, 20x20 compost bin / sheep/goat shelter, a small solar project to keep our blower fan going in the high tunnel, filling in the 900' irrigation ditch needed to get frost-free water out to the tunnel, etc. The Thanksgiving turkeys are cleaning up and fertilizing the last of the veggie fields that didn't get seeded with rye. Looking forward to planning for next season as we transition more fully into horse-power.

(Ferrisburgh) Dug the last of the potatoes last week. Not as high a yield as had hoped for but size was great. Still harvesting beets, carrots, turnips, daikon radishes, and kale. Last of the large amounts of sweet potatoes, and watermelon were shipped this week. Great to have them off inventory. Winter market sales are good, as are the farmstand .com sales. Overall the season was good for us. Even with all the rain we didn't have any devastating crop losses. Tomato sales were up approx. 25% as were peppers and eggplant. Strawberry sales were up especially the fall berries. Due to crop loss cucumber sales were down and pickles didn't get processed. Sweet potatoes are still a work in progress with this year's yield being much better than last years. We'll make a few changes for next year and see what happens. Land is cultivated and pre-readied for the spring as are the greenhouses. Here's to cold temps to keep insects in check.

(Plainfield NH) Still digging carrots and parsnips. Filling out CSA boxes once a week with whatever we can find on the farm or farm kitchen. Interestingly, many CSAers voice that the fall CSA is their favorite CSA. Go figure. Elsewhere progress has been made in getting the service

work done on tractors and machinery, greenhouses have been deep cleaned for spring, and exterior re-skinning will commence probably about the time we start strawberry mulching in about 10 days. Haven't got all of the raspberry canes tied to the trellis for winter, and hope to do some blueberry pruning before it gets too winter-like; we get too busy in the spring to get it done then. Ornamental cuttings are being taken in the greenhouses, and seed ordering will commence sometime in December. Days are so short it seems hard to accomplish much between the time it gets warm enough to get the gloves off and too dark to see, but I don't mind coming in early for supper.

(Little Compton RI) I guess we have to accept it the fall growing season is over! Dropped to 25 degrees this morning. Our fall carrots are the sweetest crunchiest we have ever grown, even the big bull horns that come out of the ground. I think it was the mild, cool and slightly droughty fall that did it. The cool down caught us with too much to do so we made a lot of quick decisions. Purple top and Hakuria turnips we will let go. It seems every vendor at the winter market has stacks of them and is bringing them home. All three of our winter markets in the RI have had very slow starts and even the restaurants down this way are off big for Sept. and Oct. The pre-Thanksgiving market will spell the trend for the winter. Looking back on the summer it was a good season once we got over the large losses associated with all the late spring rains. That bad weather hurt a lot of our winter staples like onions, winter squash. One bright spot was raised bed crops on plastic like celeriac, cardoon, artichokes, celery; being high and dry paid off. This year we saw the benefit of ongoing boron treatment in certain fields. We have been putting on half rates in certain key fields over the last three years and have steadily seen less Brassica related ailments, better celeriac sizing and bigger beets. This year was also a year to see the need for more potassium in certain crops. Our beets and sweet potatoes benefited from this. Kreher fertilizer now has a special blend (think it's 3-3-8) great value. We also are now seeing the benefit of giving our winter squash a shot of a high potassium side dress just before the vines run. It gives stems better strength and crop has more resistance to decay in storage. In a challenging year, the butternut that made it was huge and is keeping longer. Watching out for bugs in 2014! We have new ones in our area and it seems more will be migrating in. Hawaiian beet webworm which is native to North America and sometimes builds up to large numbers was a huge impact down here. I had never heard of them but they eat Swiss chard, beets, mustardy brassicas, etc. and I think they have been around for the previous two seasons and I just didn't notice. Brown Marmorated Stink Bug is in NJ and south. A lot to keep our eyes on. Thanks to all of you who bring such great knowledge to this newsletter. I always come away with something.

(Middle Granville NY) Season is finishing out as crazy as it started. Nights have been down into the low teens. Most crops are out of the fields except greens which are holding on under multiple layers of covers. GHs need some more sun to grow crops. Overall season was very good. Labor was down 10% and sales are up a bit. Wholesale was pretty strong and markets held their own, although we are seeing the effect of all the new farmers in the area. For example, even 4 years ago we could sell 100s of red bunches of beets at a market, now we have to have all 4 colors to achieve the same sales. Next year biggest changes will be increasing efficiencies and standardizing processes more. Wholesale seems like a direction that we can make money.

(Argyle NY) We were down to 18 degrees this week. Not sure if there is damage on the field greens with 2 to 3 covers on them. All root crops are pulled and in the root cellar; carrots abundant (over 5 tons) and looking great. We used an older carrot harvester and it was amazing, even though it had mechanical issues and needs some maintenance. After losing much of our celery to virus, maybe from leafhoppers, our final celery was beautiful after covering it after transplanting out with the Biothrips netting from DuBois Agrinovation; we will cover it all in 2014! The 3 high tunnels are almost fully planted after ripping out tomatoes last week. Mustards and salad greens are getting big; Asian Greens can be harvested soon. The first Salanova lettuce transplanted into the tunnel is nearly ready for cutting and each week. Our usual drench of Root Shield Plus and Actinovate will hopefully prevent diseases on greens. Megaton leeks (big and nice) are in the root cellar and the more winter hardy Tadornas are still out in the field, covered with row covers, as well as half the Brussels sprouts. Winter farmers' markets going well; nice to be inside and warm. Still looking for workers or interns who want to learn profitable winter growing on our farm! Hope to see many of you at New England Vegetable Conference in December in NH.