Vermont Vegetable and Berry News –November 3, 2013
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FSMA WEBINAR TOMORROW, November 4, noon-1pm

"COMMENTING ON FSMA PRODUCE RULES MADE EASY" The deadline for making comments on the Food Safety Modernization Act proposed rules is fast approaching - November 15. When finalized, these rules will affect many Vermont vegetable and fruit growers, large and small. Even if your farm is in an 'exempt' category we anticipate these rules will influence what the marketplace expects of all growers and food processors.

This webinar will go over the elements of a strong comment, give examples of talking points, identify alternatives to the proposed rules, and walk you through how to submit comments.

Space is limited to 100 growers; register at:
https://www4.gotomeeting.com/register/173761087

The webinar will not explain the details of FSMA; it will focus on how to comment. Please prepare ahead of time by getting familiar with the proposed rules; here are some resources:

http://extension.unh.edu/Food-Safety-Modernization-Act-FSMA
http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/factsheets/Understanding_FSMA_Rule.pdf
http://sustainableagriculture.net/fsma/

REGISTER SOON FOR THE 2013 NEW ENGLAND VEGETABLE AND FRUIT CONFERENCE
Dec. 17-19, 2013, Manchester NH

This is the biggest and best educational event for commercial growers of fruits and vegetables in New England and it takes place every other year. I will NOT be mailing hard copy brochures out this year, except upon request, so be sure to go on-line to see the program and register.

The pre-registration fee to attend any part or all of the conference or trade show is $105 for the first member of the farm or business, and $75 for each additional member (family or employee) when pre-registered with first member. There is an additional fee of $30 ($20 for students) per person for late registration or walk-ins. On-line registration should be available soon at:
www.newenglandvfc.org

You can see the full sessions and trade show hours at the same web site. Here's an overview:

Tuesday 12/17, am: Greenhouse Tomato, Sweet Corn, Mechanical Weed Control, Brambles, Specialty Fruit; pm: Winter Growing, Direct Marketing, Tomato, Stone Fruit, CSAs, SWD.

Wednesday 12/18, am: Tunnel Engineering, Root Crops, Organics, Tree Fruit, Blueberry 1; pm: Tunnel Soil Health, Blueberry 2, Postharvest & Storage, Tree Fruit, Cut Flowers.

Thursday 12/19, am: Sweet Potatoes, Cucurbits, Strawberry 1, Transplant Production, Viticulture 1; pm: Brassicas & Greens, Pumpkins, Strawberry 2, Decision Making, Viticulture 2.

If you need a hotel room book one soon as they go fast; the conference web site lists local hotels. www.newenglandvfc.org. Be sure to arrive early to avoid parking far away.

WINTER MULCH FOR STRAWBERRIES

Adapted from Sonia Schloemann, UMass Extension

Research has shown that without mulch strawberry crowns can suffer damage at temperatures below 12°F and unprotected strawberry plants can suffer damage from drying winter winds. Mulch also protects plants from injury caused by soil heaving, which results from freezing/ thawing cycles. Plants on raised beds are more vulnerable to cold and desiccation injury than plants in level plantings, especially in locations with strong winter winds. A good time to apply mulch is after three consecutive days with a soil temperature of 40°F or below. This soil temperature usually occurs after multiple frosts, and when the plants have slowed growth in response to cooler temperatures. It is best to apply mulch before the soil freezes solid. In New England mulches are usually applied in late November. Mulch from wheat, oats, or Sudan grass straw works well. It should be clean, free from weed seed, and contains a minimum of grain seed. A level matted row planting will require 2.5 to 3 tons/A for a 2 to 3 inch deep mulch, or about 300 small bales. Raised bed plantings and sites with strong wind may require twice this amount for adequate coverage. Applying mulch prematurely can shut down light interception too early, meaning that the plants will have less energy to support their winter acclimation.

WAIT TO PRUNE BLUEBERRIES

Early spring is the best time to prune blueberries. Carbohydrates produced in autumn need time to move into the roots and crown for storage. Pruning too soon can make plants more susceptible to winter injury. Pruning in early spring also allows you to remove canes with winter injury. Most blueberry farms I visit are not doing enough pruning, there are usually too many old canes left in place. For more info:
http://www.farmingmagazine.com/article-9076.aspx

SANITIZING TOMATO STAKES (and TRAYS)
adapted from Chuck Bornt, Cornell Extension

Tomato growers and transplant growers who re-use stakes and trays should clean and sanitize them to prevent diseases next year. The first thing to do is remove as much soil and organic matter as possible since debris reduces the effectiveness of most sanitizing agents. Line up the stakes up and use a power washer or take a stiff brush and clean them off as well as trays. Then use one of the following materials for sanitizing, following the label instructions. Quaternary ammonium chloride salts (Green-Shield); soak for 10 minutes, then air dry. Rinsing is not needed. Sodium hypochlorite (Clorox), chlorine bleach 5.25%, use at 0.5% = 1 part bleach + 9 parts water. Soak stakes for 30 minutes; rinse. Bleach is effective but short-lived after mixing in water; half-life of only 2 hours. It is inactivated by organic matter, so pre-cleaning is essential. Chlorine is corrosive; repeated use may be harmful to plastics or metals. Use in a well-ventilated area. Hydrogen peroxide/dioxide (Oxidate, Storox). Read labels for correct rates. Soak for 10 minutes. Sanitizing solutions only work if they come in contact with the pathogen. If objects are packed too tight, or if there are air bubbles around them then the solution cannot be effective.

FLORICANE REMOVAL IN RASPBERRIES
Adapted from Kathy Demchak, Penn State Extension

Prior to the mid 1990's, recommendations said to remove floricanes right after fruiting. Around that time, research showed that the plants had less winter injury when canes were removed during either December or early March, rather than in September. This was presumably because the plants had the opportunity to move carbohydrates from the spent canes to the crown, thus increasing the plants' carbohydrate reserves, which increased the plants' ability to tolerate cold temperatures and winter injury. In situations where cane diseases are an issue it may be more valuable to remove the floricanes along with the disease inoculum on them, and improve air circulation. This is especially important for low-spray and organic systems where cultural controls to manage diseases are critical.

So take a look at your planting, and see whether you can see symptoms of cane diseases. Look for gray sunken lesions on canes (anthracnose), purplish to dark brown areas (cane blight or spur blight). Lesions that are large, expanding, or numerous are especially worrisome. If your canes look relatively healthy, you can leave the floricanes there. If you have disease symptoms, or you've been delaying floricane removal in the past and symptoms are getting worse over time, take the floricanes out now. To suppress cane diseases, organic growers can consider using lime sulfur as a delayed dormant spray, just prior to bud break, next spring to suppress cane diseases. An overview of cane disease by Cathy Heidenreich, fruit specialist at Cornell is at: http://www.fruit.cornell.edu/berry/ipm/ipmpdfs/Raspberry%20cane%20disease%20mgmt.pdf

INFO ON MANAGING VOLES

Voles can be a problem in blueberries and orchards. Alan Eaton of UNH Extension has updated his publication on 'Managing Voles in Orchards and Highbush Blueberries", which is at: http://extension.unh.edu/resources/representation/Resource003424_Rep4893.pdf