



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – December 12, 2011
Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension
(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu
<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(West Brookfield) Spinach, chard, mesclun and lettuce are still being harvested in the tunnels thanks to this mild late fall. Even managing to hang on to cilantro under remay in the unheated tunnel. That's a first for me. No complaints.

(Benson) We gave both tunnels a thorough watering this week. Next time probably won't be until mid-January. Once growth resumes in early February, we will water every other week or so until late March, then go to weekly watering. The tunnels always seem to have the appearance of being wet, but it is mostly just surface moisture. Rutland winter market has been very good, stockpiled greens have been plentiful, for now anyway, and we are still getting significant growth even in the mini tunnels. A very good start to the winter season.

(Argyle NY) Warm weather pushed our high tunnel greens to be larger than expected, so the kale, Swiss chard, arugula, and Asian Greens are huge and looking like summer production! We are still harvesting the 8 varieties of kale from out in the fields, as well as winter leeks. Our trial of Portuguese kale yielded a very large-leafed kale that has a sweeter flavor in the summer/fall but it is not as winter hardy, and our trials of leeks (Megaton, Tadorna, King Richard, and Lexton) resulted in Megaton being the largest and nicest, with Lexton being larger than Tadorna, but we will see how all 3 are for winter hardiness. Tadorna has always done great for us overwintering with one layer of rowcover on it. The Forum onion sets and the Bridger onion plants that we started from seed in August are being transplanted this week into a 14x100 low tunnel. We haven't seen any mites or Fusarium on the spinach in the tunnels and hope the beneficial mites and biological drenches will keep them away all winter, especially since we are doing a trial with over 20 varieties! We just started harvesting spinach out of the tunnels, and the last of the field lettuce heads were harvested this past week and are crated/stored in the root cellar, along with the final field Swiss chard, where they will last about 5-6 weeks. Our 2 Saturday markets are both doing very well with customers happy to see such diversity.

(Little Compton RI) Winter is finally asserting itself; we hit 25 degrees for the first time. The extra mild last two months have bailed us out with our 'hail Mary' broccoli plantings; it has pushed greenhouse late winter greens way too far.

What we had planned on harvesting the first week in January is ready now. Our clever ideas of banking spinach have led to huge over supply right now. With this cool moderate weather the green cauliflowers (Romanesco and Envy) really slow down their days to harvest more than the others. Graffiti seems to finish off the quickest. This observation could also be skewed by the inordinate amount of rain. We have broken all sorts of records down this way. We heard from a reliable source that sweet potatoes should not be stored with butternut because of ethylene given off by the sweet potatoes. Now it looks like we need yet another storage room facility. Winter markets are good. Down a bit from last year. Probably more due to the explosion of winter markets than an economic constraint.

(Salisbury NH) Everything in the hoop house is in a holding pattern. The spinach and kale has been wonderful but planted too closely in some areas. Allstar lettuce mix was a little big so it might be more frost sensitive. Kale spectacular but we planted too closely. Experimenting with celery as we've never grown it; got started late but now the plants look great, about 4-6 inches tall so we'll see what happens in winter. The weather has been up and down; 18 inches of snow on Halloween then warm weather and snow mostly gone then 8 inches of snow just before Thanksgiving then more warm weather. Nights have been above freezing or high 20's. We have no heat in our hoop house with raised beds; we put floating row cover over some but not all. Head lettuce (Nancy) seems more affected by cold temps. Looking forward to when the days start getting longer.

(Durham CT) Amazing greens inside the hoop house. Also tatsoi, red Russian kale, arugula and even some lettuce that has been outside unprotected from the weather have regrown to harvestable size. This weather seems to add a special seasoning to the flavor of these greens. In the hoop houses we've got 8 kinds of spinach, all delicious and incredibly popular at our farmers' market. Some new varieties have already become favorites: Crocodile, Menorca, Corvair and Raccoon. Menorca is particularly good for salads; close to the ground and a much shorter stem than Crocodile and Raccoon. Other crops that are working well are: red Russian kale, Tokyo Bekana and Claytonia. After doing season extension growing for 12 years, we've come to the conclusion that there are many choices for the winter, but these seem to work best for us. We've had a small invasion and damage by caterpillars; easily controlled by spinosad. Another pest that has shown up is aphids, unusual for us this time of year. We've just been watering where we've seen them, as this dilutes an excess of nitrogen in the soil/crops, a major attraction for aphids. This seems effective. We've turned our basement into a microgreens factory this year. Demand is good and we've enjoyed the tame environment of controlled heat and light. Outside we've erected many low tunnels, now planted with either carrots, lettuce, beets or chard. Everything is doing beautifully with an eye towards early spring harvesting. Carrots planted too early will bolt and produce useless roots. Our planting date is Nov. 10. Lettuce, which usually turns to mush below 25 degrees, will survive wonderfully as baby baby plants. Low tunnels are a great low cost alternative to a hoop house.

(Enfield NH) Sales better than last year, mostly due to more product and going to farmers' markets. Harvesting greens from unheated greenhouses. Also, some kale from the field, though that could be done later with colder temperatures. Also harvesting storage crops, but beginning to run out. Good to have more crops/income, but interfering with down time and planning. Spending time planning for 2012 and summarizing 2011.

(Shaftsbury) Field picking is finishing up for us except kale and some Brussels. Moving into greenhouses for greens. Have a pretty good aphid outbreak in 4 out of 5 houses, but released ladybugs last week and they are working like mad, even on cold days especially under remay. We use about 1 pint/3000 sq. ft. released over 4 times over 2 weeks. Storage crops still look great. People love their winter veggies. Strawberries covered before snow.

(Shelburne) Winter greens are looking good, hoping we have had enough cold nights for them to be hardened well as we start to get more seasonal temps. Plants are much larger than usual since we have continued to have rapid growth all November; it will be interesting to see what the plants are doing in February and March. Managing cut worms by hand in the Swiss chard. Keeping the populations at bay. Sales of all greens are going well.

TAX IMPLICATIONS OF DISASTER RELIEF GRANTS

Dennis Kauppila, UVM Extension

Vermont farmers who suffered losses from the storms in 2011 have been receiving grants from non-profit organizations in the state. According to the 2011 Farmer's Tax Guide, IRS Publication 225 (<http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p225.pdf>) page 71, upper left hand corner, first full paragraph on the page, "Qualified disaster relief payments are not included in the income of individuals to the extent any expenses compensated by these payments are not otherwise compensated for by insurance or other reimbursement. These payments are not subject to income tax, self-employment tax, or employment taxes. No withholding applies to these payments." Then follows a list of 3 kinds of payments that are qualified disaster relief payments, all have to do with personal expenses. In the case where these farmers have had increased personal expenses due to the flood, these grants would not appear to be included in income, unless the farmers have already been compensated fully by insurance. This guidance is general, be sure to consult your tax professional for advice that is specific to your individual situation.

UPCOMING EVENTS (see www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry, click on meetings)

Jan. 8, Direct Marketing Conference, S. Royalton

Jan. 25, Greenhouse Tomato Roundtable – stay tuned for details

Jan. 30, VT vegetable and berry growers assn. annual meeting

Feb. 11-13, NOFA VT winter conference