

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – December 14, 2009

Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension

(802) 257-7967 ext.13, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu

www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Starksboro) Personally and professionally, I'm thrilled to have mesclun and baby spinach in unheated greenhouses, and my CSA pickup in the month of December had all manner of greens and cole crops from the greenhouse and the field, and I think it's really cool. I'm holding off on a lot of the winter roots until mid winter, hoping they'll feel like a special treat rather than just more of the same. I have a sneaking suspicion that folks are just dying to make some roasted root vegetables and mashed celeriac - but I won't give them any yet. I'm wondering if they'll be really thrilled to get a bag full of roots come January or whether they'll just feel frustrated (and consequently dissatisfied) at having to wait so long.

(Royalton) Underneath the 8 inches of snow, the head lettuce covered in remay is crisp and fine, as is the spinach and chard, arugula and mustard. The 5 degree nights over the weekend made everything in the hoophouses look like goners, but it's fine - we still have fresh dill! Chard, kale, rutabagas, head lettuce, mustard, daikon radish, beets and Chinese cabbage. Enough for us and for our CSA members, not in enough quantity (with the exception of the rutabagas and kale) for wholesale market. We'll see what's left for the January Farmers' Market. The celery and Brussels sprouts planted directly in the ground in the root cellar are still growing nicely.

(E. Lansing, MI) Winter is finally here. After we dipped down into the high single digits a few nights last week those unseasonably warm November days seem like a distant memory. Sales were up again this week compared to last year as more new people find out about our young farm (Nov. 4th was our 1st anniversary). Last year, 300 sq. ft. of carrot beds lasted until the end of January but this year that amount is sold out already, and the beds have been prepped for early February seeding. The Hakurei turnips have been selling great the last two weeks and we are sitting on some nice red and golden beets that will go on the harvest list after the new year. We started harvesting the green onions this week too and I had a dream that I went out to the tunnel and all the chickweed growing around them was weeded...unfortunately it was just a dream. The Swiss chard is looking good and the salad mix is still the workhorse of the farm (dollar and energy wise).

We've been selling 6 oz. bags of lettuce mix (green and red oakleaf lettuce), salad mix, (lettuce mix plus 'Red Russian' kale, 'Kyona' mizuna, and 'Tokyo Bekana' Chinese cabbage), and spicy salad mix (salad mix plus 'Red Giant' mustard and 'Astro' Arugula) for \$5 each (\$13.33/lb). We started the separate mixes since some people wanted the spicy while others didn't, but have seen that most of our customers buy a combination of 2 of the 3 mixes for the same household. The single digit temps have just about wrapped up the head lettuce but we had both green and red buttercrunch that sold well. There might be one more week of sales in that bed. Looking forward to seeing, meeting and learning from most of you at the NE Vegetable and Fruit Conference this week.

(Little Compton RI) We had some serious wind this week along with 5 inches of rain. Felt like summer again! Rollup sides ripped and anything loose is now next door in the neighbor's front yard. This all speaks to an ongoing discussion I have had with many growers; are we heading into a period of weather extremes? It is certainly looking that way near the Atlantic coast. My wind generator has made more power in the last two years than it averaged the first ten years I owned it. I am speaking at the NEVF conference about "movable tunnels" for growing and I feel it is very important to stress that these greenhouses can move, crash or crush! It behooves us all to make a yearly audit of all critical stress points of all our houses; especially the temporary ones.

Now about growing: nothing unusual (thank goodness!) market steady. More than ever before I can see Paul Arnold's credo bearing out, "you will sell leeks, potatoes, carrots, etc. (storage crops) at any winter market, but you will sell a lot more of those crops if you display has some incredible fresh spinach, Swiss chard, beets, etc. next to them. The greens make other crops seem fresher and more vibrant. One new lesson this year about parsnips and carrots: we used to store them with soil in closed boxes. Now we wash them and put them in plastic bags and put them in the coolest part of the cooler. With our old method the soil became increasingly hard to removed and dried out the roots. They stay hydrated in plastic bags and aim to keep them at 33 degrees. Everyone have a safe trip to NH.

(Shaftsbury) Kale outside still looks great but the greenhouse kale, which seems more tender, took a hit in the cold the other night. We kept our carrots in the ground too long this fall. They looked great until late October, but because it was warm we did not feel pressed to dig them until late November, by then they were decimated by late wire worms in about 3 weeks. Bilko napa cabbage still looks great after about 7 weeks in storage in the walk-in cooler. Diablo Brussels sprouts (Bejo seed) have so far out performed Oliver in winter hardiness, though slower to grow for early fall sales.

(Durham CT) I was lucky enough to get a visited by a botanist from the CT agricultural extension center last week. He needed leaf samples from lettuce and spinach for some of his research. While he was here, he explained to me something that I only knew on a superficial level: how winter greens manage to survive freezing and thawing. This seems like an important thing to know, since we base our winter income on greens in high tunnels. The very short answer is that the outer layer of the plant, which is mostly cellulose, acts like a row cover for the rest of the plant. Coupled with this, the 'water' inside the plant tissue is much denser, hence its freezing point is lowered, compared to outside water. There are other factors at work here, such as the role of lipids and proteins, but I thought this was interesting.

Meanwhile, we're enjoying good sales of salad greens, carrots, spinach, and cilantro. Last week, during a warm break of a day and a half, we were able to uncover outdoor spinach and make a large harvest. Happy to say that our low tunnels are staying put so far this season; last year we made them too long and they became a target for the wind. Already, lettuce, carrots, mustard and spinach are growing well inside them and should be ready to harvest by March. In the hoopouses, spinach (Samish, Renegard and 7 Green) and red Russian kale are all happy.

REMEMBERING GREG BELIVEAU

Greg Beliveau, 54, died last Tuesday from melanoma. He leaves his wife of 25 years, Lisa; their two sons Dillon and Liam; many family members and friends; and ten cows. Greg was well-known to the Vermont vegetable growing community, as he participated in so many of our farm meetings (he had the big handle bar mustache) and he also sold tractors and outdoor wood boilers to farmers. Many years ago as new extension agent visiting Goose Creek Farm, I left my truck running while taking a greenhouse soil sample, and it rolled into the swamp. Greg got his bulldozer and pulled it out, with a kind smile but hardly a word. He was that type of person. Expressions of sympathy can be made with a donation to the Trust for Dillon and Liam Beliveau through the Merchant's Bank, 26 Ballards Corner, Hinesburg, VT 05461 or in Greg's name to the UVM Plant Diagnostic Clinic, 235 Hills Building, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405.

VT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWERS ANNUAL MEETING FEBRUARY 1, 2010.

Capital Plaza Hotel and Conference Center, 100 State Street, Montpelier
Doors open at 8:00 am for trade show, program starts at 9:30 am.

President's Remarks - Bob Pomykala, Grand Isle

Tour of Soil and Pest Management on VT Farms - Vern Grubinger

Greenhouse Energy Best Practices - Chris Callahan, Cambridge NY

High Tunnel Funding - A Pilot Program - Jim Wood and Vicky Drew, NRCS

Growing Greenhouses Vegetables in St. Lucia - Mike Collins, Westminster

Update from Industry Representative on New Products

Updates from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture - Sec. Roger Albee and Steve Parise

Thirty Years of Organic Fruit Production in Northern Vermont - David Fried, Wolcott

Mighty Food Farm: the First Three Years - Lisa McDougall and Chuck Currie, Pownal

My Experiences with Cover Crops - Pooh Sprague, Plainfield NH

Visit the Trade Show!

Pre-registrations \$35 Members, \$45 Non-Members, this fee includes delicious hot lunch and coffee break, must be received by Jan 28th. Add \$5 for at-the-door registrations. Membership dues for 2010 are \$50; benefits include: 2010-11 New England Vegetable or Small Fruit Management Guide or one book or video of equal value; subscriptions to Agriview, American Vegetable Grower and American Fruit Grower, \$10 discount at the annual meeting, free farm workshops, and inclusion on the association's grower listserv (buy, sell equipment & share info).

New this year – no-frills membership option for \$20; benefits include: inclusion on the association's listserv, showing your support for the vegetable and berry industry.

Mail check made out to VV&BGA to: Doug Johnstone, P.O, Box 701, Springfield, VT 05156. Please include note stating your membership selection and who is being registered for the meeting.

Attendance at this meeting will be worth 2 pesticide recertification credits for private applicators and commercial applicators certified in categories 1a and 10.

Sponsored by: USDA Risk Management Agency, University of Vermont Extension, and Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Assn.