



**Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – February 14, 2012**

Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension

(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, [vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu](mailto:vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu)

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Montpelier) Food Hub CSA memberships are starting to come in and we have not even advertised yet. The mild weather and lack of snow has meant many fewer hours on my tractor and the snowblower. I don't think I will have to buy shear bolts for next year. Lettuce house and the two spinach houses have been producing really well. We saved some greenhouse plastic and cut it up to put over the individual beds in a few places to see how it would do. Worked great for some of the lettuce crops that have not made it in past years and did a nice job of retaining night time heat. Just a lot more effort to get out to the house and make sure you take it off on a sunny day. We put drip irrigation into one spinach house and left it set up to do our watering. Working incredibly well for us. The lines drain and no freezing. No need for hand watering and we are keeping the plant tissue nice and dry. We will be doing it next year in all the houses in the fall. Probably run 4 lines per 4 foot bed though. Not enough this year. New seedling house is up and the heater is hung! What a treat after so many years. Exciting to see how it will improve our efficiency and start quality this spring. Markets remain really strong and not much resistance to pricing. Reality is that prices need to go up this year. New plantings of strawberries and asparagus going in this spring. Just made the first new hire as getting ready for another season and excited about it. A couple of new markets and letting go of a few others.

(Westminster Station) I'm getting ready for another season. Hopefully the weather will be good. I can't take much more.

(Benson) All is well in the Lower Champlain Valley. Had just two weeks without spinach while finishing up lots of stockpiled chard and kales. We're back to harvesting 30+ pounds of spinach each week now, picking an assortment of chard and kale, and cutting Asian greens from the heated bench. Beets, carrots and potatoes look great in the root cellar with no sign of softness. Markets have remained strong this winter, most likely because we have had a significant quantity of greens each week and customers have not left us for the grocery store.

(Shelburne) Winter greens holding in well. Rainbow chard doesn't overwinter in this climate, as we used to do so successfully in zone 5 in Michigan. Will try Fordhook next year. Dino kale is not thriving but hanging in. Winterbor is doing great. Harvested last full size heads of escarole last week, outer most leaves were frost tipped, but otherwise nice heads. Getting ready to transplant new round of kale, chard and spinach. Direct seed more spinach and salad mix this week too.

(Westminster West) Pansies, violas and parsley; basil, chives and sage. Lots of herb seeds emerging and the propagation benches are already full and transplanting under way for a new season and this year it feels like it snuck up on me. A nice break from shoveling out the greenhouses from deep snow like last year and like a true pessimistic farmer I just know we will have hell to pay for such easy living. Or maybe it's payback for last year, who knows but here we grow again: so far so good. Snow cover is all gone, I wonder what this means for the water table later this season.

(Durham CT) We had multiple re-growths on spinach this winter, even without 10 hours of daylight, there was lots of growth, but of course, there has been lots of warmth, too. This winter we concentrated on spinach, claytonia and kale. The kale, while doing well in some respects was much harder to manage the persistent chickweed that we've grown to love and respect. The only plus about chickweed is that it does taste delicious when young. In our Low Tunnels we experienced a wide range of results. Johnny's 5-star lettuce is doing great. Swiss chard has succumbed to mice and cold. We're replanting the disappointing crops fast as we can. In the nursery, there is a load of spinach, pak choi and lettuce plants ready to be planted along the sides of the high tunnels in a week or two. Aphids have been controlled with Safer Soap and just plain watering. In the basement, where there is free heat, we've begun our first round of tomatoes, all of which will be grafted, as they were last year.

(Salisbury NH) In the hoop house we had spinach, lettuce, chard, scallions and kale going into the fall but because of the mild weather things got too large to survive. We picked lettuce, chard and spinach into November but then most of the lettuce and chard leaves got papery looking and died. Was going to take it all out but this week we're seeing new leaves coming. Spinach survived the whole winter without any row cover. Unfortunately so do the aphids and white flies and some 'fruit fly' looking bugs but they don't seem to match the picture of the SWD (no spots on wings). Digging in the soil we also turned up 3 army worms! Watered last week as things were really dry and the weather was fairly mild.

(Little Compton RI) We are limping toward the end of our Deep Winter CSA. This crazy warm winter has thrown monkey wrenches into our best laid plans to keep fresh vibrant greens coming along every week. An explosion of greens came three weeks ago and we had to sell it all at farmers markets. Not a loss but our shareholders expect those greens for another 6 weeks of greens. Next year we may try to stay in the fields longer than this year with Johnny's conduit mini tunnels full of Swiss chard, spinach, etc. We may take a tip from a grower in Conn. who says perforated clear plastic covers make all the difference for late fall production. They may also help with the Cladosporium epidemic we have had in our remay covered spinach houses. Next year we need better air exchange in them. Trying to find the funds to build a storage facility on our farm-\$50K plus! It is clear there is money to be made with winter production and the ones who will do the best are the farms that can bring the highest quality produce to the markets. Winter storage is as important as growing the produce itself.

(Middle Granville NY) Greenhouses are growing again- higher disease rates this year than ever before due to warm, wet fall and early winter. Put down ladybugs this week for aphids. Replanting several sections for one more harvest before tomatoes go in in April. Still no significant snow cover- garlic is up through the mulch, and we're getting pretty worried about a lot of our overwintered field greens making it. Market sales are still pretty strong- sales of prepared and frozen veggies are really taking off.

#### HIGH TUNNEL VARIETY TRIAL

Nick Warren, graduate student at UNH has completed a 1-year study with 14 varieties, see: <http://extension.unh.edu/agric/FactSheetsandResearchReports.htm>.  
Click on 2011 high tunnel tomato trial.

#### SEEKING GROWERS TO PROVIDE INPUT ON COLD STORAGE STUDY

Farmer input is needed for a case study on the state of regional cold storage options. How have has your system worked for you? What would you change if you were to redesign your system? What has been your greatest success in using your cold storage system? What is lacking in our regional cold storage system? Types of cold storage of interest are root cellars, squash rooms, coolers or freezers. If you use cold storage on your farm (or rent cold storage off the farm) to store crops for winter markets and would like to share information about your cold storage systems or cold storage needs please contact Garland by emailing [masong@greenmtn.edu](mailto:masong@greenmtn.edu) or call 802-287-2940. The information you provide will help us improve the stronger cold storage infrastructure in our region.

## INFO NEEDED TO IMPROVE CROP INSURANCE ETC.

All VT Farms- even if you don't have crop insurance. Your input is needed on this 10 minute survey to understand how we can better manage risks to crops and livestock. Are you at risk for weather, disease or pest related crop loss? Are you satisfied with crop insurance programs? How are you managing risk on your farm? The Post Irene Working Group has developed a short survey to assess how farms across all sectors are working to manage risks. We hope to learn what key steps can be taken to better protect our farm businesses from these risks into the future. Please click on the link below. It will lead you to the "Post Irene Production Risk Survey" on Survey Monkey. If you have any questions or you would like to complete a confidential paper based survey, contact [mark.cannella@uvm.edu](mailto:mark.cannella@uvm.edu) or (802)223-2389 x207. Survey link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/65PVLC2>

## DIRECT MARKET PRICING WEBINAR FEB 21

The Vermont Direct Market Pricing Project is an initiative of UVM Extension, in partnership with the VT Vegetable and Berry Growers Association, NOFA-VT, and the Vermont Farmers' Market Association. The goals are to help farmers share information about what they charge at direct markets for farm products and to provide education about farm pricing strategies. To that end the following free webinars are offered. At 7 pm on Feb 21 "Pricing for Profit" will explore practical approaches to cost-based pricing, and how to integrate market information - what your competitors are charging - and your own profit goals in your pricing decisions. Participants will learn how to use the on-line Direct Price Reporting tool and will be eligible for small-group pricing clinics and farmer-to-farmer mentoring in March. For more information, contact the UVM Extension New Farmer Project at [newfarmer@uvm.edu](mailto:newfarmer@uvm.edu) or 802-223-2389.

UPCOMING EVENTS: see: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/meetings/meetlist.html>

Feb. 21 - Winter Growing and Marketing. Concord NH

March 26- Garlic School. Albany NY

April 18 - Initial Pesticide Applicator Training, VTC. <http://pss.uvm.edu/pesp/cert.html>