



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – February 21, 2017
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Shelburne) Here at Bread & Butter Farm we have 10,000 sq. ft. of winter greens. We are focusing this year in kale, collards, chard, spinach, cilantro, parsley, salanova and scallions. We had a mystery pest issue in the fall with our spinach and discovered that we have symphylans eating the root systems of our spinach plants which has severely stunted about 1/3 of our spinach crop. This has been a major financial hit. We are strategizing about how to move forward with these critters. Not many growers in the Northeast have had these at a level that has hurt their crops so we are just figuring it out. If anyone has dealt with these and has any strategies they want to share, we would love to hear. We have very high organic matter in our heavy clay soils and we know that symphylans feed on high organic matter so not sure what to do about that. We are curious about fungal interactions with the symphylans and think if we can promote a carnivorous strain of fungus in our soils naturally, they may keep the symphylans in check. We found some papers from the west coast that support this theory. Otherwise, the rest of the crops are having a relatively good year given that it has been a normal temperature winter. Our chard lasted longer than usual, we are actually still harvesting the chard, down to the base at this point. We will finish harvesting and will then let it chill for the next month and then it will put on new growth again. The Brassicas are all nearly harvested but we are stretching out the final harvests to supply our winter CSA and excited for them to regrow here over the next 2-4 weeks. Parsley was stripped down about a month ago and we expect regrowth in that same time frame. Always thinking about what balance of crops is the best for us and always making adjustments as I go. I think I will do more scallions next year. I planted garlic in the hoop for the first time (since I had some space from spinach that failed in the fall), so we will see how early garlic in the houses do.

(Braintree) The Winter Spinach is re-growing nicely and quickly. Dodged the Downy Mildew bullet this time around. Spring Spinach, Onions, Scallions and Swiss Chard seedlings have all germinated evenly and are looking healthy. The root cellar is starting to finally empty out from last year's harvest. Still have some potatoes, carrots and cabbages hanging on... but not for long. Loving the stronger sun.

(S. Burlington) Teaching. Meeting. Ordering. Sorting. Scheming. Skiing. Brainstorming of sustainable efficiencies for year two of the farm. Irrigation. Mechanization. Black plastic. Doubling in size...praying for double the profit. Posted my 2017 internship description and application today! And pondering the legal realities of internships on a farm. Filled with community and power from NOFA conference and realities of migrant justice and empowerment of women and people of color in the agricultural movement. Onward to seed sorting, inventory, purchasing and reaching out for 2018 land leasing land opportunities. Hopefully one step ahead of myself until June 1 when I always feel a bit behind. Feeling blessed to be a young woman farmer in Vermont!

(Charlotte) We're still getting greens from the hoop house. Spinach, kale, mache, endive, and claytonia all have survived quite well. Starting to see a little regrowth. Arugula, mizuna, rouge d'hiver have survived but at a lower rate. The cold spell in December killed maybe 1/3 of the plants, but the survivors are starting to regrow a bit also. I'm prepping beds to plant carrots, radish, arugula, mizuna, rouge d'hiver, and maybe some more spinach this week. We'll be planting head lettuce into trays this week to transplant next month. Aphids are starting to show up, but not too many yet. Surprisingly, I haven't had much vole pressure yet. It's nice to be digging and raking in the soil. Getting onions seeded inside our house this week.

(Newburyport MA) Arrowhead Farm. Winter crops, both heated and unheated, doing extremely well, even without much sun. Using no row cover this year has eliminated all disease problems. Even zero nights in December did no damage to unheated, uncovered greens in cold houses. First flowers on tomatoes; will be going into the greenhouse beds in two weeks. Greenhouse Strawberries in 12" baskets, overwintering at 34 degrees, showing visible bud clusters. Will start slowly raising night temps. Winter FM sales way up from previous years. Accepting credit cards has made a YUUUGE difference for us. Looking forward to see what a difference credit cards will make for our summer FM sales. Highest margin products at our markets this winter? Vitamin Greens @ \$16/# and preservatives-free Yorkshire Pork Sausage Links @ \$19/#. We will be offering more money to retain the good folks who keep the farm running this year.

(Ange-Gardien, Quebec) Planning is done and seeds are coming up through mail. Getting prepared for the season. I realised this winter that I have many infrastructure that are not fully utilised. My goal is then to get the most of what I have (which is not that easy). First seedling are done, growing well. I am trying greenhouse strawberry in suspended boxes on top of spinach this spring, see how it does. Some mustards greens did overwinter in the greenhouse, I was pretty surprised about that. I am always amazed by the taste of these leaves after a winter, they get so sweet, they are definitely a different product.

(Little Compton RI) Finally got a program working to grow lettuce through the worst of the winter and make money with variety choice and plug spacing. Now I wish I had seeded a second and third crop in late November. Seems like the cooler winter is slowing down the garlic and overwintering onions. But they all look healthy. Greens are still the top money maker at the winter markets. Bok Choi is finally moving; that crop has died for us during the summer and fall. Can't explain it other than we have too many other new greens folks like better. Even Whole Foods is buying our winter produced greens and excited about it. This is the time of year when you want to check on all your batteries. Bob at Electric Vehicles of America offers some suggestions: Take the batteries out of your parked tractors and put them in a storage unit that is cool but doesn't 'freeze' (fighting subzero weather just shortens their life.) Charge them up once a month. Ebay has 'Battery Pulse Desulfators'; they keep a very light pulse resistance going that helps keep the sulfur ash from building up and shorting your batteries life (\$18 each). The next best thing is to exercise them once a month and then recharge them. I used to know an old farmer who would take a few minutes each month and hook his batteries up to an old hot plate for five minutes to exercise the battery and then charge it back up to prime.

(Salisbury NH) Still finding caterpillars and/or cut worms that are surviving in the unheated hoop house. Rouxai (red lettuce from Johnnys) did well in the hoop house - green lettuces (Nancy and others) got knocked down from the cold with no row cover but the red held up. Carrot tops were eaten by something in the fall but amazingly the carrots seem to be alive and actually grew. It may have been grasshoppers as there were a lot of them. Planted beets, lettuce, carrots, scallions, spinach and radishes this weekend. Was 50 degrees on Sunday. Had to water too. Anxious to start other things but know we're still going to get plenty of cold.

(Plainfield NH) Desk work, doctor appointments, squeezing in vacation time, snow removal, small machine repairs, and propagating ornamentals are our biggest occupations this time of year. Tax prep has been completed, and I am trying to sort out and understand what I need to do this year in terms of CAPS, FSMA (we hope to do a mock recall) and the new WPS standards. Annual farmer meetings are about wrapped up and rooted cuttings and grafted tomatoes will arrive next week. We are purchasing some grafted red tomatoes through JSS this year because of costs of doing our own and I have not been happy with my success percentages. I will still be doing our own cherries and heirlooms, but hopefully there will be a cost benefit in time and bench space saved. Battling two-spotted spider mites on the ornamental stock plants, trying to control them (with some success) with *Phytoselius persimilis*, but am concerned whether the controls will keep ahead of pest populations as the sun gets stronger. We have the unfortunate system of seeding some early vegetables in mixed houses of ornamentals, which is not an ideal situation.

(Argyle NY) Pleasant Valley Farm. Another round of warm weather; we can hardly stand it! Growth of everything in the tunnels has been wonderful. Spinach was planted late last fall and now it is finally kicking in. Seven days late in planting does equate to 7 weeks late in harvesting. The downy mildew on the spinach seems to be on hold, due either to spraying Double Nickel, temp, and/or ventilation. The fall planted onions in the smaller tunnel (7' high) look really nice and will need irrigating this week. Unusually early. Lots of transplants are going in the tunnels now such as Asian greens, broccoli raab, spinach, and scallions. Seeding onions, leeks, shallots, lettuce, and parsley in the greenhouse. Root crops still look good coming out of the root cellar, some are waning right on time. Farmers' markets are strong, about average for us.

ORGANIC STRAWBERRY GROWERS SCHOOL

March 6, Lake Morey Resort, Fairlee VT. Topics to be covered: Fall-Planted Plugs, Plasticulture vs. Matted Row, Matted Row PYO Over the Years, Using Leaf Analysis to Guide Fertilization, Everbearers Under Low Tunnels, Growing in Haygrove Tunnels, Strawberry Varieties, and Organic Strawberry Costs and Returns. For info and registration see:

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/meetings/OrganicStrawberryGrowersSchool2017.pdf>

UVM EXTENSION AG BUSINESS CLINICS

This is an opportunity to schedule a one-on-one meeting with a farm business educator to develop budgets, prepare financial statements or discuss business plans. Locations are available statewide from March 14 – March 30. Online Registration information is at:

<http://www.regonline.com/march17clinics>

FARM LABOR SURVEY

The results of this 10+ minute survey about farmer experiences managing farm labor will help shape educational programs and decision tools that a multi-state team is developing.

Responses will be anonymous. Questions? Mary.Peabody@uvm.edu. Please take the survey at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/aglabor2016>

POLLINATION SURVEY

Pollination services are essential for many agricultural crops. This survey will help document farmers' views and actions about pollinators. This information is needed to guide development of policies and educational programs. Go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/vtfarmer>