



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News –February 27, 2013
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Montpelier) The salad house is looking pretty rough for this time of year. Even the Claytonia was zapped. I have to believe it was the 50 degrees one day and 2 below the next. First time I have ever seen it 'burned' like this. Spinach is coming to life and looking really good, flavor is there. Now it needs to finish coming in. We have never had a gap in winter spinach but have one now. Running some trials with Verdanta from Bioworks. It activates at 58 degrees so it will be interesting to see how the spinach does once we get a few more sunny days. So far no tissue burn from the fertilizer. Starts are going in the seedling shed and we direct seeded a few things in some open space in the greenhouse and they are up and running. Only a few more winter CSA deliveries and then a break from that until early June. Plenty of interest and sales remain strong. Starting to see more and more winter greens from other growers at market. A good thing on the one hand and also a need to develop new markets on the other.

(Benson) It's been a good winter. Markets have stayed strong and I am trying to figure out how to triple greens production ASAP. The demand is fantastic and growing rapidly. High tunnel is showing good growth and we are pulling old plants and transplanting new ones a couple times a week. Both the high tunnels and low tunnels need water weekly now, even though it is a bit of a chore to drag the hoses. Root cellar stuff looks mostly good although I have some sprouting carrots; not sure why because conditions seem ok, and same as in the past (37-40 degrees and 90-99% humidity.) We are seeding onions in the propagation house this week, finishing up seed orders and generally enjoying the warmer weather.

(Craftsbury) The blueberries are over-wintering well, despite the presence and activity of several dozen deer browsing almost daily. Turkeys, too, have been active foraging throughout the 4 acre orchard. I have read that the deep snow pack and intermittent hard freezes and gentle thaws may reduce the insect population this year and delay the northward march of some other pests. We are having difficulty securing mulch for our spring work; the source we had come to rely on has dried up so we are scrambling for a new outlet.

(Rochester) Update on our broken electronic pruner: Campagnola has met us half way and will provide the new part at half its normal price. Kudos to OESCO for negotiating that for us and for minimizing their own charges to us also--they are the best! Snow pack is not deep, so absent any major storms we expect to be using this tool in just a few weeks.

(Grand Isle) Spring is in the air. The season for growing crops for 2013 is in a holding pattern; waiting to see how strawberries, spinach, garlic, sweet William, and campanula made it through the winter. Our grafted tomatoes have come through OK, but I wish I could say we had 95 or 100 percent success. Results prove it is always good to plant extra. Our recently seeded petunias have been an interesting experience. We bought petunia seed from a reputable company we love and find the pelleted seed is not singular but rather each pellet has 6 plant seedlings emerging per cell. The seed company is as bewildered as we are! Winter projects continue, mainly cutting fire wood, repairing tractors, and paperwork. As far as using pallets to move farm produce, we have cut back on the use of heavy wood ones and have been saving our backs with the black plastic variety. They are nice and light and don't have hidden nails that can catch the unsuspecting guy or gal.

(Little Compton RI) Winter markets are doing great; about the same sales as last year which is very good. This fall when seeding our last outdoor greens crops we opened up the spacing to twice the distance, to see if we could get some red Russian kale, blue Vates kale and others to make it through the winter and provide good greens in mid-March to late April. We expect them to go to seed eventually, but hope they will give us two profitable pickings. They were looking good before the big blizzard three weeks ago but now we can't see under the remay. The chickweed will be giving them some serious competition. We have a month left for CSA and the potatoes will just get us across the finish line. Next week we'll build a caterpillar PVC quick tunnel over our Thanksgiving-planted Nelson carrots. They are also under snow but I want them to break dormancy in a warm environment. I am hope it works and gives us carrots by May 25.

Grafting lots of tomatoes. They got a good cold snap during the blizzard; 48 degrees because our boiler literally blew a gasket. We survived with our trusty 500K Btu propane heater. We now seed Maxifort rootstock a day or two behind the top seeded varieties. We have observed that even though they are slower to germinate than Geronimo, once they reach the second true leaf stage they take off like the super vigorous plants they are, which makes it difficult to match them up with the top graft. We would rather have bigger tops to graft than bottoms. I think this may be the reason that grafting in late April and May is problematic; stay tuned.

(Salisbury NH) Kind of glad we didn't get things planted in the tunnel on time, because the plastic wasn't on until very late. At least some bugs are sure to die without any food. We did have a small planting of leaf lettuce and didn't bother to cover it during the below zero temps. It looks pathetic. Will start planting soon; some lettuce, spinach, pak choi started in flats to transplant. Still waiting for soil test on hoophouse before planting to see if any major adjustments are needed. Seed prices seem to have really shot up. Overall we got many jobs done this winter due to lack of snow cover. Just a few whopper storms but before that almost bare ground. Eleven hours of daylight tomorrow should really kick things into high gear.

(Enfield NH) Starting to seed the first greens and the first tomatoes. Still burning brush in the new field that we cleared, will be planting there in 15 months or so, if the FSMA allows us small farmers to be in business.

(Ferrisburgh) Just back from Florida with all that 'nice' weather and now firing up the greenhouses. While there visited Knox Nursery, a wholesaler of plugs and finished product. Brought bedding plugs back with us to get a jump on baskets and planters. Getting early vegetables started. Let's hope for more sunshine.

(Hampton NY) Windstorm at the end of January took a layer of plastic off half of the #4 greenhouse. New plastic has been installed and plants are started. Last of the seeds are being ordered this week. After trying advertising in several newspapers and on two radio stations last year and seeing no return on the large investment, we will be sticking to the small local paper and radio station that has worked in the past. The greenhouse lights on at night seem to be all the advertising that we need.

(Hollis NH) field report from Brookdale Farm. Lots of snow 12 to 18 inches with warm days has caused mud season to set in. Winter greens and other developing plants in the greenhouse water schedule has increased as we see more sunlight within the day. Excellent weather to take a road trip to Hollis for irrigation and row crop supplies. All products are ready for pickup.

(Wolcott) Starting to get this year's crop list together. Looking at previous year's yield data to determine how much to plant this year. Almost ready to start mapping the fields out. Cover crop plan for this season looks like we'll spend \$65 an acre to cover it twice. Already have next year's budget figured out for the farm. Getting ready to order spring supplies. Plants in the high tunnels are starting to grow, they survived the winter at really high rates and are ready to do their thing. Listening to the hustle and bustle of tape guns, labels printing and fingers typing; all while I sit at my desk and imagine luscious plants with fruits full of seeds.

(Argyle NY) The 2 Saturday winter markets have remained very strong all winter, with customers loving all the fresh greens out of our 3 unheated high tunnels. This was the first year we've had some cold damage on the lettuce, chard, arugula, Asian greens, and even the kale, but not extensive. We have consistently been able to harvest about 120 pounds of different greens each week, and many varieties are now starting to regrow much more quickly. The spinach trials (again) are going well and we'll have data in March. Just completed our third greenhouse seeding of lettuce (head lettuce, minis and Salanovas) and spinach for future tunnel plantings; the salad mix (individual varieties of the five star lettuces) and Happy Rich broccoli were all seeded the beginning of January, along with a large assortment of Asian Greens that are almost ready to transplant into the tunnels to replace things that have gone by. Drip irrigation has worked well in the tunnels this winter, even though some edges froze and weeding out chickweed has kept winter interns busy! Very little diseases but we just put out some ladybugs this past week as we saw a few aphids. Looking forward to warmer days.

(Plainfield NH) Grafting tomatoes, taking vegetative cuttings of ornamentals and seeding ornamentals are the major activities here. Leeks are seeded and we are trying to finish up onions this week. Blueberries were pruned in the fall, so we are trying to get some machinery rebuilt and out of the shop in time to get our soil mixer-flat filler set up for bedding plant season. We were able to control pests in the greenhouses in 2012 on tomatoes and ornamentals with beneficial insect releases and a few spot sprays. It wasn't cheap, and maybe we were lucky, but we're encouraged and hopefully getting better at using biological controls. Margaret Skinner and Cheryl Sullivan at UVM have been very helpful in our successes, and I highly recommend all growers to utilize their knowledge and expertise in vegetable or ornamental greenhouses. We have been monitoring and recording for 8 weeks so far in 2013, and with releases and a couple of biorational sprays we are off to a good start with our program. Elsewhere we are starting to put together the seasonal crew with interviews and referencing.

NRCS-VT HIGH TUNNEL FUNDING AVAILABLE

Vermont NRCS has just pre-approved 17 high tunnels for funding. Over \$300,000 is still available to fund additional applications. The next application deadline in Vermont is April 1. Here is a link to the program fact sheet, with phone numbers for the VT NRCS offices.
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs142p2_010212.pdf