



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – March 17, 2014
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(South Burlington/Shelburne) We spent the last 24 hours on full time snow removal from our greenhouses. The heavy snow and steady 30+ mile per hour winds were the perfect scenario for uneven snow load on the north side of our houses and we wanted to take every precaution to prevent the houses from collapsing. We ended up with about 2 feet of snow, although it is super hard to really tell the total quantities because of the drifting. But, the south sides of my hoops are so highly piled with snow and there is none on the north side. Inside the greenhouses the spinach has steadily started growing again and harvesting is back in full swing, despite the unseasonably cold temperatures of late. The kale is just having a hard time snapping out of January slumber. My kale is smaller and less vigorous looking than I have ever seen, which is a huge disappointment. I am actually ripping out some of it early to replant with other crops which should yield more, sooner. Disappointing but a good lesson in what the limits are for full sized kale. Cilantro is looking great. It too has sprung back and appears as though we will get several good harvests before those beds get turned over.

(Fairfax) Carrot washing still going strong. Only a few weeks left of washing. Greenhouses are sucking down the fuel. Minus 6 this morning and another round of minus temps coming. The fuel bill is growing rapidly. At least the skiing is good! Just calculated we spent over \$120 for one day to heat a 30 x 95 GH. That was for propane and pellets. We continue to use our beleaguered old LDJ pellet corn furnace. We are anxiously awaiting a delivery of corn, which it much prefers over pellets. Our Maxim boiler burns well with either corn or pellets, and with it being outdoors we don't have to worry about ethylene issues.

(Westfield) The soil is finally thawed in the high tunnels and the spinach is starting to grow. The greenhouse seeding is well underway: onions, leeks, greenhouse tomatoes, celery, spinach, begonias, perennials, herbs, petunias, and the pansies are transplanted. The first hanging baskets are transplanted and will be ready for opening in May. The low temperatures make for higher fuel consumption; not so great for the bottom line. There's nothing like the smell of fresh green sprouts, moist soil, and the warmth of a greenhouse oasis in a snowy northern Vermont March landscape!

(Randolph) If I'm going to plant corn in 40 days, either the weather, or my plans, will be changing significantly, and soon.

(Williston) Cold weather and gray skies have taken a toll on my hoophouse crops. Spinach and cilantro have held on but kale and chard are looking sad. The 20 inches of light fluffy snow we got makes it very dark inside the house when it all piles up. There is only 1 layer of plastic greenhouse cover and my row cover inside was too lightweight for the polar blast that persisted through the winter. As soon as the warmer, sunny days of late March/April come along I will take a soil sample in the hoop house and send off to UMaine lab for the long term high tunnel test, to get ready for the new summer season; I already picked up my NOFA bulk order so ready with soil amendments. I signed up with the AgSquared program and working on crop succession plantings; it works very nicely and is user friendly. You can get a free month trial through Johnny's. I spent some time looking over my weather records from the last 3 years and saw how all over the chart they were. I guess this is part of climate change which makes it hard to plan. I saw that April was the driest month in the spring and that is when to take advantage of getting into the fields.

(Guilford) Things are frozen that haven't frozen in 15 years.

(Woodbury) All of our recent snow makes spring seem far away, but I know it gets closer every day. Keeping up with the snow and the greenhouses was relatively easy until this last month. The tractor mounted snowblower paid for itself these last few storms. This is the part of the year where I really need to stay on the calendar, because I am not inspired quite yet. Tomatoes for the first greenhouse are looking good, ready to graft soon for a mid-April plant date. Haven't fired up the main greenhouse, will do so March 21. Filling it with onions and first seeding of everything else. I am hopeful that this is the season that I finally put together under bench heating and make better use our wood boiler for targeted heating. Winter seems to fly by when it comes to all those things I was going to do before spring comes.

(Plainfield) Onions and leeks coming up in the greenhouse. Two weeks late in starting up. Time to seed peppers and celeriac. Bought a new heat mat set up. The old one could not heat above 70 no matter what temp it was set for. Nothing overwintered growing in the unheated hoop houses. It's going to be April before we get anything edible. Looks like quite a mud season. Lot's to do, trying to muster some enthusiasm.

(Monkton) All set up for sugaring but very few runs so far. The snow cover is great for strawberries though. Onions are up, other seeds started, supplies, and plans ready. All we need is spring, and another experienced person for our crew. Apparently lots of choice out there for good help.

(Westminster West) The crazy cold is less fun and less profitable but the weather has a way of balancing out so looking forward to April for payback? Erecting 2 new greenhouses is almost impossible with the ground being frozen solid but we are making headway and the time crunch will only get worse later so we press on. Awaiting arrival of much needed predators for the greenhouses now that the days are longer and a bit warmer. Aphids have made their appearance but we have the natural tools to deal with them. Life is easier now that I installed wireless temperature sensors in all the greenhouses that give me live graphic updates online and on my iPhone as well as phone notifications when temps go too low or too high. I found them at the Veg and Fruit Conference in Manchester last Nov. and that alone made the trip worthwhile. Still doing last minute planning on field stuff and looking forward to using our new 3-row Rainflow waterwheel in the spring. I'm shopping for a new tractor to pull it; prices are a bit higher than the last new tractor I bought 34 years ago. Glad I signed a contract last fall for the propane and oil we are going thru. Still selling turnips and carrots from the cold storage unit we built last fall; quality has stayed high and customers are thankful.

(Elmore) I have never had more people asking me when we are opening, telling me about their large crop of cherries this past season, or asking me when they can up to the farm to pick up more blueberry plants. We have been shoveling the high tunnel and making plans for what need to accomplish each week of spring. If we plan well when we can't be out in the fields, then when we are out in the fields, the planning will help us to be so more efficient and not spin our wheels. Knowing what to dig, what to propagate, will help us to focus on getting the most important things done within the slim window of spring we always get in the north county. It seems like common sense, but it has only gotten through to me as we begin our 35th year.

(Burlington) Finally getting to the back of the walk-in. Appreciate how much good temperature and humidity control make such a big difference when storing for the long term. Further realizing how initial produce quality heavily influences storage crop profitability. We had unusually clean cabbage go into storage this fall and have been loving it all winter long. Next year's project: figure out a good winter wash station and logistics.

(Weare NH) Getting lots of seedlings started. Potted some up with the hope of getting in the tunnel by now, but temps too cold. Working on the rain water catchment set up for the tunnel. Trying to get as much pre-assembled as possible so once the weather gives the opportunity to install, I can get it done before the field work pressures take over.

(Plainfield NH) Snow and ice are contributing to added expenses in all areas of greenhouse operations from taxed furnaces working at capacity, additional cost of fuel to added labor for trying to move plants, pots and people around the greenhouses. We are in the middle of transplanting season and busy grafting tomatoes which we seem to be more successful at than in past years. Planting date for the first is about 10-14 days out so we have been watering those houses and incorporating amendments to ready them. We are now paying a high degree of attention to biologic controls in our greenhouses as pests are waking up: thrips, foxglove aphids 2-spot mites, and some mealybugs in the overwintered tropical ornamentals. A few whiteflies on the yellow sticky cards; normally I wouldn't be concerned but recently heard a talk by Brian Spencer of Applied Bionomics and he is predicting a huge outbreak and problem with Silverleaf WF on the east coast, for which Encarsia Formosa is not that effective. Guess I have to spend some time trying to differentiate the WF species when I am scouting. I am still trying to differentiate all the species of aphids. I am hoping the winter has been tough outside pest populations of scarab beetles, flea beetles, TPB and SCB. But Alan Eaton of UNH Extension says that from what they know, the cold winter will not be detrimental to SWD populations.

(Little Compton RI) Suddenly having tomato grafting problems; it always seem to occur during the transition back into the hot dry greenhouse! The devil is in the details. This unrelenting winter is driving us crazy. We are starting field crop transplants too but unsure how backed up we will be if we don't get back to what has passed for normal March temperatures in the last ten years. Winter markets are good but not brisk with certain days when there is low activity for no reason we can think of. We are about two weeks from kicking out all our GH greens to make way for the early summer tomato crop. Aphid banker plants not working like I had hoped.

ENERGY IN OUR FOOD SYSTEM

Vermont's Comprehensive Energy Plan calls for obtaining 90% of the state's energy from renewable sources by 2050 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions 50% from a 1990 baseline. The Energy Cross-cutting Team of the Farm to Plate Network has compiled many useful resources to help farms, businesses, vendors, installers, and technical assistance providers increase energy efficiency use of renewables, including seven Energy Success Stories that are the first in a series of case studies. See: <http://www.vtfoodatlas.com/network/energy>

CROP INSURANCE SURVEY

Please complete this short survey aimed at improving crop insurance programs for growers. Help us identify the methods vegetable and fruit growers currently use to manage production risk; their experience with crop insurance policies so we can determine how well crop insurance programs serve vegetable and fruit growers and make suggestions for improvement. Individual replies are anonymous; the aggregate results will be shared to inform farmers, technical service providers, program staff, and policymakers about the effectiveness of crop insurance from farmers' perspectives and to suggest possible program improvements. The survey takes about 5 minutes to complete and you can enter for a raffle prize of a \$50 VISA gift card. Questions? Jen Miller at jmille30@uvm.edu. The link is: <https://survey.uvm.edu/index.php/257185/lang-en>

FARM TRANSFER WORKSHOPS

March 26, 9:15 am - 3:30 pm at American Legion Hall, Middlebury and March 28 at Stone Grill Pub, Morrisville.

This workshop will cover transition planning, goal setting and retirement, estate planning, tax and healthcare considerations, and facilitating communication among family members. An attorney will speak on wills, trusts, probate, and legal issues. Other speakers will address Medicaid and health issues and use of conservation easements. A farmer panel will share their experience. Registration is \$20 per person, \$25 if postmarked after 3/19 (Middlebury) or 3/21 (Morrisville); includes all materials, refreshments and lunch. To register send name(s), contact info, workshop location, and check payable to UVM, to: Transferring the Farm, c/o Elisa Ziglar, 204A Morrill Hall, Burlington, VT 05405-0106. For more info: Bob Parsons (802) 656-2109 or bob.parsons@uvm.edu.

SELLING TO REGIONAL MARKETS DISCUSSION

April 1, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm at the Berlin office of UVM Extension

Two farmers will talk about selling to regional farmers' markets, restaurants, and retailers and two distributors talk about selling through wholesale. You will learn about the personal, production, financial, and marketing skills needed to sell to direct and wholesale regional markets. RSVP Maggie at the Intervale Center, maggie@intervale.org or (802) 660-0440 x116.

NAVIGATING FEDERAL LABOR LAWS ON FARM LABOR

April 4, 8:30 am to 12:30pm at the VT State House Room 11

This workshop will provide federal payroll training for farmers. Farmers around New England have been facing increased enforcement of labor regulations. Several local farms have faced heavy fines for inadvertent violations to these laws, sparking debate about the details of these laws and how they are being interpreted. Daniel Cronin and Christopher Mills of the U.S. Dept. of Labor will tease apart some of the nuances of these laws and explain how they are being enforced by the Dept. of Labor. They will explain where the line is currently drawn between types of farm work that are and aren't exempt from the laws' provisions. RSVP by 3/28 to Louise Waterman at 802-828-6900 or Louise.Waterman@state.vt.us

PESTICIDE APPLICATOR TRAINING

April 8, 9:30-11:30 am at Yankee Farm Credit, 52 Farmvu Drive, White River Junction

Organic and conventional growers using pesticides on their farm are required by the Worker Protection Standard to be trained prior to doing so. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture is offering this free training at. To register contact: Annie Macmillan 802-828-3479 or anne.macmillan@state.vt.us. Additional group training is available to growers by request.

SPOTTED WING DROSOPHILA WORKSHOP

April 10, 10:30 am- 3:30 pm at the New Community Center, in Claremont, NH.

This workshop will cover the latest information on SWD monitoring, trapping, ID, cultural controls, and organic and conventional spray options. Speakers include Hannah Burrack, N. Carolina State University, Vern Grubinger and Margaret Skinner from UVM, George Hamilton and Alan Eaton from UNH. Preregistration by April 1st is required, the fee is \$25 per person. 5 pesticide credits will be awarded. For more information, contact Cheryl Sullivan, 802-656-5434 or cfrank@uvm.edu. The registration form is at <http://www.uvm.edu/~entlab/>.