



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News –March 18, 2013
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Cabot) In the high tunnel, Strawberries look great, crowns starting to form up leaves. Fruiting buds on thornless blackberries starting to show swelling. Spinach and lettuce mix growing again. Soil temp was 50 degrees in raised beds on March 13.

(Shelburne/South Burlington) Spinach has come on strong in mid-Feb through now. The kale has been a little slower at regrowth since the days with sun have been limited, But still getting twice-weekly harvests. Planted new spinach and kale, lettuces, escarole, and ready to seed arugula and salad mix. Overwintered kale is ready to bolt; looking forward to selling the bolted flower stems, pre-flower. This cold snap may move that along more quickly, but we'll see. Going through organic certification for the first time; that has been an interesting process to learn.

(Westminster West) Winter is back but we are busy pretending Spring is around the corner. Seeding and transplanting veggie packs for gardeners. Pricking out tomatoes for grafting and doing thousands of vegetative cuttings from our herb stock plants. Very few greenhouse pests so far, our IPM is working just fine! No diseases found so hopefully off to a good year. Still planning for the coming season, interviewing people for a driving position. Our entire farm staff are returning from last year, so I guess we must be doing something right.

(Starksboro) We did a big sealing up of the greenhouse. We are saving so much fuel! It feels great, and at the same time kind of embarrassing that we waited so long to do it.

(Huntington) Passively cooled winter storage crops are appreciating the cold weather of late, but the greenhouse eagerly consumes propane as penance. This week will see the last wholesaling of sweet potatoes and potatoes, which will provide a nice chunk of time to devote to getting the greenhouse ready for the next rush of seeding as well as equipment maintenance we have been putting off all winter. Local wholesale and winter farmers' market in Burlington have been strong. For obvious reasons, we will not be chisel plowing on March 20 like last year.

(Woodbury) I had hopes of starting early this season but too much happened. Then it turned cold again; glad I waited. The greenhouse is ready to go, potting soil will arrive this week then there's no turning back. Crew is lined up, and we're excited about working together again. What a difference a returning crew can make. Imagine: people who understand the tasks at hand and know how to do them, know why we do things a certain way, and put up with me. I am truly lucky. I plan on bringing grafted tomato plants to market for sale this season for the first time. I think that there is enough understanding of the benefits among my gardener customers that sales should be good. What a great time to be a grower; not a weed in sight.

(Barton) Tomatoes are 3 inches tall, onions are 5 inches and eggplants are coming along nicely; peppers are all sprouted. Today we planted cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts and more peppers. We may have started too soon with tomatoes (mid Feb) but hoping to get them in our greenhouse by late April so we are not as far behind as we were last year. This is first year for our 21x24 heated greenhouse. We heat it with an outdoor boiler and it's working well but is devouring our supply of wood supply at a frightening pace.

(Grand Isle) Lack of snow cover presents some worry that areas of the strawberries with little straw mulch might suffer. We have switched from oil fuel to wood pellet fuel in our main greenhouse. Setting mice traps is a nightly precaution, as they find newly seeded trays tasty. We winter-sowed red clover; will see how it survives the spikes in temperature. A first this year is the inclusion of three generations of the family helping out on the farm. The lengthening days and added sunshine are a joy.

(Williston) Hoophouse is slow to spring to life maybe because we have had 20+ days of cloudy weather each month recently. Cilantro is showing new growth and the rosemary is still green thru the cold temps this winter. We had 9 degrees this morning but should get to above 30. Looks like more snow removal from the hoop house in the next few days. Started some flats of scallions, leeks and shallots but will soon run out of space! Picked up my NOFA bulk order last week and am ready for spring. The snowdrops are out and the daffodils are peeking out!

(Burlington) Gotta love it when the temperature drops and the snow returns right as we turn on the heat in the greenhouse. Winter CSA shares finishing off this week; a good run with most crops. Surprised to find that sweet potatoes stored very tolerably up to now in the same 50-55 degree and low humidity enjoyed by the butternut squash. Members loving our giant 'Kossack' kohlrabi; too bad we didn't start sampling them out earlier in the winter. Liking our first few cuts with the new Johnny's cordless drill powered greens harvester; considerably faster and more consistent than hand cutting.

(Little Compton RI) We are trying to come up with a scheme for having good outdoor greens in late March for two reasons: to get back our heated greenhouses (with greens in them since October) for tomato production and to keep us in good stead with our "deep winter" CSA members who expect nice greens every week. By March 15 the greens must come out and make way for tomatoes. Our solution was to seed or transplant Red Russian, Siberian and Redbor kale outdoors in mid-October to overwinter. We transplanted on black plastic and because they grew too well we covered them on Dec 10 with the tall Johnny's electric conduit low tunnels. The other technique was to use a Jang planter and direct seed with a wide spacing so we would get uninhibited growth in the cool early spring. Right now the transplants on black plastic are the winner; the seeded rows are not doing well and a big problem is chickweed; we have lost the battle with that. Unless we can lower our weed seed bank for next fall it will be all plastic and plug production. The last sweet potatoes, butternut, celeriac and Watermelon radishes, etc. are gone. We don't want to end our winter CSA with a whimper but it is looking that way. Three more distributions to go, sunflower sprouts to the rescue!

(Highgate) Overwintered spinach planted last fall is starting to grow nicely in unheated greenhouse. Nice robust baby leaves that are almost succulent in nature. All healthy plants.

(W. Brookfield) Winter spinach beds still producing strong with minimal damage from crown mites; a big change from last year. This year's starts are up and going strong. Onions, hot peppers, and some tomatoes are up and ready for more sun. The main tunnel is being prepped for the romaine transplants as well as the first mesclun of the season.

(Plainfield NH) Early tomato houses are fitted up and ready for transplanting the 4.5" pots next week. Transplanting and seeding. Deliveries of rooted ornamental liners are bringing some unwanted thrips, aphids and even some spider mites on the southern-generated material. Snow is gone from the fields (unless we get hammered this week). Deer are pressuring the strawberries and nipping emerging garlic shoots. Turkeys came out, scratched off all the mulch from the berries looking for grains in the straw and the deer are moving right in behind them. I went into the woods and found out why we have been experiencing so much deer pressure the last few years. Ski trails I helped cut up a hill thirty years ago looked like they had been freshly mown, and the deer population is so large now they are literally mowing the browse off in the forest leaving a park-like understory, and then moving into the fields.

I believe there will be an additional labor cost of 12 hours a week just to manage deer fence (electric portable and baiting) starting at planting time, plus the cost of materials. It has to be bad in the woods because last week I saw a new pest in the strawberries I hadn't seen before: a porcupine out in the middle of the field in the middle of the day gnawing on a strawberry crown. What next?

(Montpelier) Deep into grafting for our non-heated hoop houses. Trying HMS new root stock and measuring results against Maxifort. First note is Maxifort grew faster and taller which was best for Geronimo. Also testing Fedco's Luci on both rootstocks. Luci grew slower than Geronimo. Just trying to find the best mix for our customers and our abilities. Picked up some bargains at Pete's Legare Farm sale.

(Westfield) Finally starting to harvest spinach. There is still a good snow cover outside with more predicted: 'poor man's fertilizer'. The nights are too cold and the greenhouse furnace runs constantly. The seedlings are looking good and the tomatoes are now 6 inches high and strong. They will be planted out in another 10+ days in the greenhouse. Pansies are about to start to be transplanted. Hoping that the spring run-off won't be damaging.

(Rochester) Still buried under snow in our cold pocket and will be more buried after the approaching storm which is predicted to deliver more than a foot of snow. Much happier about that than the 80 degree weather we had on this day last year. It will be April before can get to the blueberry pruning, but that is more like the old normal.

(Salisbury NH) We didn't get anything planted in the tunnel in fall so we planted carrots, radishes, mesclun mix, spinach and chard the last two weeks. Nothing up yet but very close. Covering spinach and lettuce plug trays with row cover at night. Transplanted Nancy and Skyphos lettuce into beds, forgot to cover them when outside temps were down to 18 but they looked fine in the morning. Spinach trays have spotty germination; Pak Choi didn't do well either. May be due to old seed. Started Jetstars (we're probably the last grower on earth not grafting), eggplant and peppers. Will try slitted plastic cover for tomatoes, peppers and eggplants as they seem to get hammered the first couple of weeks. The weather tricks us with warm days but as soon as the transplants go in the ground, the temp drops and the wind howls.

(Enfield NH) Greenhouse is full of onions and greens. Seeding more this week; eggplant and tomatoes, and more greens. Still ordering and planning in the house more than anything.

(Middle Granville NY) this time of year is always super stressful, we're fixing equipment, the greenhouses are running full bore with transplants, we're getting ready to put tomatoes in a couple of weeks, we're checking and rechecking our master plan to make sure that everything is in order. Other than a new tractor and vegetable washing line no new equipment this year (at least planned), we are adding a 3rd well though. Had some freeze damage in lettuce in the tunnels, tops seemed fine but cores froze and plants collapsed, we feel due to the uneven cold swings during the winter. Also seeing way more Cladosporium in spinach than we would like to. Opening up a new 8 acre field this year. Last 3 years have been a mix of cover crops as we ready it for certification so should be great to grow on this year. Not looking forward to the snow forecasted for tonight/tomorrow, things where just starting to dry out a bit.