

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – March 9, 2010

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Montpelier VT) What a difference a week makes in the greenhouses. 'Spring' spinach and salad are going crazy. Time to start calling my accounts. Spring peeps are now 4 weeks old and looking really healthy and happy. Getting them moved outdoors by April always works better. New mobile coop should be finished in time. Flock is going to 300 birds this year. Demand for eggs is solid. Winter greens demand remains solid and selling everything at market. Still not enough to wholesale and price difference gives little motivation to. The season goes into high gear this week, everything gets going including heavy early spring harvesting. Lots of new ideas and projects to work on.

(Moretown VT) The greenhouse spinach and mesclun that was seeded last October seems to be growing overnight. Ready for first harvest in a week. Transplanted red leaf lettuce 2 weeks ago in the greenhouse and it is growing great. Radishes have germinated. Building new raised beds with plastic and straw in aisles. Ready for the snow to melt. Bring on Spring!

(Argyle NY) Growth in the high tunnels has been great for the past 2 weeks, with surplus production of spinach and mesclun for the winter markets. Last week we transplanted Five Star lettuce mix, mustards, Asian greens, and arugula into the tunnels where the turnips and broccoli raab came out; the transplants were started in the greenhouse on radiant heat benches first week of January. We're experimenting with onions in the tunnels by planting yellow Granex onion plants and sets. Have others tried this? Weekly seedings started 2 weeks ago in the greenhouse for lettuce, spinach, and mesclun. Direct seedings have been done in tunnels with mache and arugula. There have been no aphids at all and no sign of the cladosporium spinach disease, but we've learned to keep the one end vent open at all times, which seems to keep humidity down and prevent the disease; it has already appeared in tunnels left closed up this year. The snow is almost gone outside but parsnips still very frozen. We look forward to adding them to our market mix as some items are running out. The last of the Brussels sprouts, winter radishes, red cabbage, winter squash, sweet potatoes, and garlic are being sold this week. However, Swiss chard and kale are increasing, and we just started selling our ground, dried garlic made from the seconds of garlic heads. Our 2 winter farmers' markets are going strong.

(Wilmington VT) Looking forward to another year of us working with Mother Nature; she leads and we follow! We were 2 days from starting to prune blueberry bushes and now they are covered in 68" of snow; the good news is we are in the germination house and things are growing. I look forward to hearing from everyone around the region; you are always a window to what we can expect in 3 weeks.

(Durham CT) Spring has come to the high tunnels. We have seen a great regrowth in the past two weeks of spinach, claytonia and kale. Everything is sweet because of the cold, and very healthy. We have been watering a lot to get the nitrogen level down, a helpful way to avoid late winter aphids (thank you, Eliot Coleman.) Our new planting of Brassicas is slowly taking off; after three weeks, healthy leaves but no true leaves yet.

Meanwhile, out in our low tunnels, we are seeing positive results, finally. For the past two years we have put up low tunnels, but it has not worked out, but this year there is glorious early spring spinach and young baby lettuce. The spinach is ready to harvest now and the lettuce should be ready in about two weeks. Carrots, chard and beet have also germinated and put up true leaves. All these outside greens were planted mid November. In the past I made the low tunnels 100' long; not good, way too much of a target for the wind, 40' works better. Also I learned that if you start lettuce late and have very small plants they'll carry thru the winter; larger lettuce just turns to mush. Farmers' markets sales have been strong and customers are so happy to have sweet, fresh and 'carbon-free' greens.

(Rochester VT) Until we got thirty inches of snow on February 24, it looked like our spring pruning was going to start very early. As it stands, we hope to start on the blueberries March 16 when the snow is down to a few inches. Meanwhile we are nearly done with cherries where the pruning is above the snow line, and raspberry pruning will begin when the ground is dry. To save us from repetitive strain and fatigue we invested in two battery-operated pruners. We tested both a Felcotronic F800 and a Campagnola Tronic-star in the field, on cherries, blueberries and blackberries, and are glad we did. While we found the Felco more appealing at first glance based on a few features, we found the Campagnola friendlier to use. The grip is more comfortable and the access into tight spaces is better. Also, you can select a mode that does a cut with one touch and only opens up either fully or half way; the latter extremely handy for repetitive work on canes up to about 3/8" thick. We have used them on two dozen cherry trees and are very pleased. Itching to get going just need the snow to subside!

(Enfield NH) Just covered a greenhouse that will be planted to spring greens. About to start seeding onions. Pretty much ready for the season.

(Royalton VT) Started arugula, radishes and peas in the hoopouses. Transplanted globe artichoke roots to the hoopouse that I dug up from last fall. The kale, chard and arugula all survived outside under the snow due to our mild winter and are candy sweet. The wild leeks (ramps) are about an inch out of the soil, and the sap is running like mad. The blinding sunlight today is a welcome change from a long, relatively snowless winter. Still feasting on Jerusalem artichokes, cabbages, leeks, potatoes, rutabagas, garlic, onions and celeriac stored in the root cellar.

(Killington VT) Soil test for hoopouse tomatoes has been sent to the lab; Asian greens and lettuce will be ready April 1; planting is ongoing. Beef, pork and egg sales for January and February are up over 2009; we are doing more work with the computer.

(Granville NY) Winter so far has been strange- cold and cloudy, then cold and sunny, then no snow and cold, now warm and some sun. Tunnels are doing okay, spinach in smaller houses got tipburn; bigger houses did better. In mini-tunnels (6' x 150' long) we're finding that they are only good for holding crops into the late fall early winter, nothing beyond that. Swiss chard died back in them as well as kale got burned. New seedings in the houses look good, but coming up a little spotty. We're getting ready to "raze" and raise one of our houses- it's a 30' x 100' that was put up with short sidewalls and mostly wood end and side construction. We're going to tear it down and rebuild it with all the changes we've learned over the years; should be interesting as we're trying to do it while a crop is growing inside! Biggest thing we've learned in constructing houses is plenty of have movable work platforms, trucks with pallets in the back, boom lifts, scaffolding, tractor buckets.

We applied for this high tunnel cost-share that the USDA is doing (who didn't) and have found out that the program does not work well for us. No mechanical ventilation allowed?! No electricity? Where we are, if you don't inflate the poly it's asking for you house to be in the next county by nightfall! And then I found out that I am a "Historically Underserved Farmer" (farming less than 10 years); what a blow, I could've been getting a larger cost share all these years and didn't know it. We'll be getting some money from the government, but it just might be for the psychologist bills.

(Fair Haven VT / Hampton NY) Warm days and moderate nights in February have brought us a very early spring. We were lucky to only have 16 inches of snow dumped on us in the past week's storms. The warm weather has melted 90% of that already and the rest should be gone soon; the daffodils in warmest areas are well up. Winter farmer's market is picking up a bit from the January / early February slump. We were worried about our sales those few weeks but after looking at the last 2 winter market seasons we found we are matching past sales. Until we are at a full frenzy outside we'll finish cleaning the farm office and finalizing winter projects. Setting up a new computer system to track sales and farm bookkeeping; we hope this will save us time and aggravation for tax time next year.

(Westminster West) We have onions, artichokes, greenhouse tomatoes and some flowers started, germinated and growing. We have much more to come in the next 4 weeks and beyond. The unheated poly-tunnel has spinach, arugula and broccoli raab/rapini growing, but slowly because of all the cloudy weather. CSA shares sales have been slow but I usually panic about that and customers eventually come through. This sour economy makes it tough for people to shell out the cost up-front. We are very excited to have been qualified for a high tunnel cost share from the USDA.

GET ON THE LOCAL TOMATO TRANSPLANT LIST FOR GARDENERS

In response to last year's problem with late blight infected tomato transplants from out-of-state, Ann Hazelrigg is compiling a list of locally-grown transplant sources for gardeners. The list will be organized by county and posted on line and linked to a button on the Vermont Extension Master Gardener website that says BUY LOCAL TRANSPLANTS and it will be advertised on the WCAX 'Across the Fence' television program. Commercial growers in or near Vermont who will be selling tomato (and other) transplants for home gardeners should send their farm contact info (address, phone, website, etc.) to ann.hazelrigg@uvm.edu. And don't forget to take this very short on-line survey: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MY5PKCH> to help us document last year's late blight issues.

STILL TIME TO REGISTER FOR ON FARM ENERGY CONFERENCE

The On Farm Energy Conference will be held March 15-16 at the Radisson Hotel in Manchester NH. Two concurrent tracks focus on Greenhouse Energy and Oilseed Crops & Biodiesel. Registration is \$25 for one day or \$50 for both, including lunch. Mail to: UVM Extension, 278 S. Main St., St. Albans VT. For full the program brochure and registration information call Heather Darby at 802-525-6501 or see: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/meetings/FarmEnergyConf3-10.html>.

GROW AN EXTRA ROW FOR RUTLAND AREA PEOPLE IN NEED

The Rutland Area Farm and Food Link (RAFFL) is seeking farmers and gardeners to Grow an Extra Row of vegetables for local children, families, and individuals in need. Last summer and fall we were able to collect and distribute over 10,000 pounds of fresh produce, meat, cheese and eggs to 14 non-profit organizations in the greater Rutland area. We invite you to become a part of the process. RAFFL volunteers can pick products up at your house or farm, or can organize a formal gleaning. Contact RAFFL at 802-417-7331 or visit www.rutlandfarmandfood.org. (editor's note: well-run gleaning programs are also active in other parts of the state; contact the Vermont Food Bank.)

SIGN UP FOR A CROP MOB

A crop mob is when a crew of volunteer farmers, farm workers, and eaters descend upon a farmer for a work blitz! Jobs can include weeding, greenhouse construction, harvesting, or any number of other jobs that can be done quickly and well by many willing hands. See this Blog to learn more:

<http://cropmob.org/>. The Green Mountain Crop Mob was started this year by Rachel Schattman, Bella Farm, Burlington and Emily Curtis-Murphy, Fair Food Farm, Calais. We are currently signing up farms and mobsters for the coming growing season. Crop, dairy and livestock producers are welcome to register. Visit the Green Mountain Crop Mob to find out more and get on the list: <http://greenmountaincropmob.weebly.com/index.html>.

ORGANIC FARMERS NEEDED FOR WEED STUDY

A study by UMaine seeks to understand how organic farmers think about weeds, weed management, and strategies to manage weeds. Five organic vegetable farmers and 3 organic dairy farmers in Vermont are needed to participate in the project, which will conduct soil sampling in 2010 on one field of each farm to characterize the weed species and the abundance of each species. In 2011 farmers will be interviewed to document knowledge, beliefs and perceptions of weed management (their 'mental models'). Participants will be visited once more in 2011 for a survey on economic decision making related to weed management. Participants will receive a detailed analysis of their germinable weed seedbank, including identification and abundance of all species. Their insights will make important contributions to improving practical research and outreach. If you are interested in participating or want more information contact Dr. Eric Gallandt (207) 581-2933 or gallandt@maine.edu.

TIPS ON TRANSPLANTING SWEET CORN

Thanks to Jon Satz, Woods Market Garden, for helping with this fact sheet: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/factsheets/transplantingsweetcorn.htm>