



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – May 1, 2023

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<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Westminster) Spring is going great so far, fieldwork is getting done on schedule. We have 10 acres of transplanted lettuce and kale growing well; beets and carrots are up, and the first asparagus is poking through. We're seeing some of the best greenhouse germination in years – nearly 100 percent-- of kale, lettuce, and cabbage.

Our first sweet corn transplants are in the ground, and they'll be knee-high by the fourth of June, fingers crossed. We planted 20 acres of alfalfa/orchard grass with the Esch multi-species seeder from Cheshire County Conservation District. (To stay in the good graces of the hay farmer, we cultipacked the field first to smooth out the bumps.) Another 20 acres of field peas and oats went in as a cover crop.

Last week saw the last of our storage beets and purple daikon go out the door. We've been cutting overwintered field spinach for Harlow Farmstand, which opened last weekend for the season, and some other customers.

The first of our H-2A workers arrives momentarily, although local labor is practically nonexistent. If we don't see immigration reform soon, I don't see how we and other farmers who rely on H-2A labor can stay in business. The ever-increasing adverse effect wage rate, in particular, is very burdensome.

(Grand Isle) Blueberry bushes made it through the winter just great. A little rabbit damage on some of the bushes. Pruning is done.

(Waterbury) I sighted my first tarnished plant bug in my unheated high tunnel with cut flowers growing in it.

(Elmore) Great weather for ducks and frogs, and they have been in great abundance at our farm lately. Rivulets of running water everywhere washing away topsoil and making canyons in the good earth. Snow and hail yesterday covering the ground. Have to wear rubber boots every day just to get through the deep mud and more rain is forecast for the next ten days. Kayaks ready. Plum trees and pear trees loaded with buds opening to flowers soon. Perennial vegetable beds sprouting up nicely with good crops of sorrel, rhubarb, horseradish and Jerusalem artichokes. Garlic beds looking good and currant bush cuttings propagated in March are growing new leaves in the high tunnel.

(Pownal) Blueberry Fields of Vermont. We have been working hard pruning blueberries and raspberries and fertilizing along with adding sulfur in the blueberries. Costs for fertilizer and sulfur have increased, after significant increases in the past several years. Not sure how costs can continue to go up. Glad this is retirement farming. We enjoy the hard work it takes to produce good produce for our locals. The blueberry buds look great, and we can really see the growth after last year's heavy pruning.

The raspberries are budding but do not appear in super shape. A few days of very warm weather in the winter months, followed by freezing is something we have seen before, and it resulted in poor production in June. We shall see.

(Westminster West) Still burning wood in the house gives you an idea of the current weather situation! Spring plant sales started very strong, but things have slowed due to cold and rain all week. We do a number of preorder truck load sales so that helps a lot when the weather doesn't cooperate. Still, have several plantings that we may have to donate to the Foodbank to keep the benches turned.

Field work besides garlic is nonexistent for now, although the garlic looks great! Thank goodness for tunnel work, tomatoes went in yesterday, cabbages and Napa are growing fast and I'm doing a tunnel of potatoes for the first time, through black plastic to warm the soil, 4 early varieties, will post results! We are looking for an ice machine. If someone's stuck with one, please let me know.

(Huntington) I'm glad we got a lot of amendment-spreading and primary tillage done back in those glorious days of early April, as the last 10 days have seen less than ideal drying conditions, even on our well drained ground. I find it challenging to follow my spring tillage mantra of "Just get as much done as soon as the ground is fit" but we have to plant most of our crops on a pretty strict schedule dictated by greenhouse transplant seeding dates. That said, having ground bare for an extra week or two is far better than mudding plants into poorly prepared ground if an earlier window was missed.

We sold our final bin of potatoes and sweet potatoes last week, just as our field planting season began, so we had a pretty seamless transition between selling last year's storage crops and planting this year's. Now comes the tricky question of how much to raise prices this year. Last year I was concerned about demand destruction setting in if we all raised prices as much as we really needed to, but I was pleasantly surprised on that front. We need to give our professional crew raises, so I guess that answers that question. Another pleasant surprise was an up-tick in job applicants this winter, and have an awesome crew lined up with a bunch of folks who know the ropes.

We got our spring soil tests back last week. That is always a fun dossier to tear into, and after 14 years on this ground certain trends stand out. Despite the hysteria in certain marketing channels around how tillage obligately destroys soil, burns up OM, and causes compaction, our system of full-width tillage with aggressive cover cropping continues to maintain OM levels (at 2.7% to 5%. not 1.2%) and soil aggregation, and penetrometer readings show no problematic compaction levels.

Sure, for context, we're on flat, well drained sandy loam soils, we experience no wind or water erosion, and our vegetable rotations allow for high-biomass cover crops, but the tillage-shaming usually leaves out such context. I just wanted anyone tilling with their tail between their legs to hear that they are not alone, and they might in fact *not* be ruining their soil. I mean, they might be, but let data help form that conclusion.

(Grand Isle) It's nice to see the peas growing. The tulips love this cool wet weather. Thanks to help from Ann Hazelrigg we have identified a new pest for us in the greenhouse cucumbers. We have [sow bugs and pill bugs](#) eating the stalks of plants at the soil line. These are not insects but arthropods related to crayfish and unfortunately are thriving in the moist greenhouse environment. As they say: it's always something!

(Saratoga Springs NY) This spring has been challenging with its erratic weather. We were able to plant our spring brassicas two weeks ago. They now need a good weeding. Flea beetles are in the field in full force. Alliums got in last week and look good so far. Heavy wet compost from our local supplier has been difficult to apply with wheelbarrows. Sore backs and wrists. We used a tractor with a front-end loader to apply it to a new field with some success. Potatoes will be planted there today. So far, our new perimeter 3D deer fence appears to be working. We start markets the first weekend of May. The tunnel mustards are a little big (probably need to push up seeding dates), but Salanova lettuce looks like it will be perfect.

(Salisbury NH) Would like to hear more about [jumping worms](#). My neighbor worked for NH Cooperative Extension before retiring and she said I have them. Are there any on-going studies we can access to keep up with this issue?

Transplanted Brussels sprouts and cabbage under cover and hoping the root maggots don't destroy everything. Onions and leeks are appreciative of all the rain. Hoping the peaches and blueberries produce something this year. That warm spell followed by 17 degrees below with winds sure didn't help.

Already I'm in "running mode." No smooth transition from winter to spring. Adding more flowers to the mix as people seem to happily pay more for something they can't eat. Continuing my no-dig process and trying various ways to keep paths weed free. I do see less weed pressure in the beds and seeing more worms now, but I am worried it's the darn jumping worms! Nine deer have been cruising the property. Let's hope they don't stay for the full buffet. People are already asking when the farm stand will open. I hear more complaints at the grocery store about prices.

(Plainfield NH) Crazy weather continues. We had a hot spell with two days of 90-degree weather since last I wrote. It certainly threw us all out of whack and compelled us to charge out into the field to plant some things early. Carrots and beets went in, but now we are a little concerned about the sweet corn we put in on the 20th on our early ground. I suppose we will either look like geniuses or village idiots, time will tell.

No H2A guys yet, two weeks overdue. The paperwork jams in so many bureaucracies make our heads spin. Yet the core crew continues to plant up the tomato and vegetable houses while repairing all the cranky heaters and waterline. That is going well.

We had our big tillage tractor go down with only 900 original hours on it. Tier 4 engines and all the electronics in new machines may be efficient, powerful, and easy to operate but when problems arise days are lost while the dealership works on just the diagnostics.

Retail greenhouse ornamental sales commenced last Thursday, and early signs would indicate good demand, and a seasoned crew helps that end of the farm operate smoothly, although some of our greenhouse infrastructure is showing its age, and there will be a large punch list at the end of the season for repairing and replacing things. The main pest problem in the greenhouses this year is aphids, although with the exception of one azadirachtin/pyrethrum spray we have mostly managed with the release and use of biologicals.

(Argyle NY) Warm temperatures have been welcome to work outside along with some timed rains to help us prioritize our week. Seedlings and transplants are looking good except for the flea beetles that reared up when it hit 80 and bit the broccoli raab hard. Seem to be in remission at the moment. A different bug we picked up, from bring plants in from other farms, in our greenhouse is a sage leafhopper that goes after sage, rosemary, and anything else it likes. Difficult so far to control but lets you know to be diligent about bringing in plants from other sources.

Tunnels are in full transition from winter to summer crops as kale and Asian greens are going by. Celery, broccolini and tomatoes are in or going in this week as a start. Have strawberries ripening in the tunnel right now which might be a good transition to outside production and have a long season. Chandler variety planted last fall in one of them could be a nice experiment. Stay tuned

UVM EXTENSION POLLINATOR SUPPORT PROGRAM UPDATES

Laura Johnson, Pollinator Support Specialist

First queen *Bombus* (bumble bee) sightings came in from Washington county, Champlain Valley, and mid-Connecticut River Valley during the summer-like week of April 10. Other sightings that week included two solitary, buzz pollinating *Andrena* (mining bees) and *Colletes* (cellophane bees), resting in the warmth of dirt driveways on farms. These bees can be mostly found nesting in the ground and some *Colletes* will also nest in hollow twigs.

During the week of April 18, a farmer reported they let high tunnel kale and broccoli go to flower this spring and that the flowers in their tunnels were “absolutely covered with many different wasps and bees” including bumble bees. In Chittenden County, *Andrena* were seen in field margin willow flowers at a blueberry farm, where blueberry buds are in bud swell and tight cluster stages. Wasps were found on wet mulch below bushes. Several *Ceratina* (small carpenter bees) were found at another farm, nesting in the pithy stems of summer raspberry canes pruned last fall.

Upcoming pollinators workshops:

- Supporting and Monitoring Pollinators in Apples, 4:30-6:30pm, May 10, UVM Horticulture Research and Education Center, S. Burlington
- Supporting and Monitoring Pollinators in Blueberries, 5-7pm, May 23, Cedar Circle Farm and Education Center, Thetford
- Supporting pollinators, birds, and beneficial insects in a rotational sheep grazing and blueberry system, June 9, 10am-noon, Owl's Head Blueberry Farm, Richmond
- Supporting pollinators, birds, and beneficial insects on a diverse livestock farm and rotational grazing system, July 19, 10am-noon, Rebop Farm, Brattleboro

UVM EXTENSION AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING UPDATES

Andy Chamberlin and Chris Callahan

- Greens Spinners for Farm Use. <https://go.uvm.edu/greensspinners>
Is drying greens a bottleneck? This blog post highlights a range of options available from hand cranking to industrial machines and a splash of DIY washing machine builds in between.
- Building a Better Greens Bubbler. <https://go.uvm.edu/bubblers>
Save time dunking lettuce into sinks and let it agitate itself using an aerator. This post instructs how to build one complete with a bill of materials, and a video highlighting key features.
- Farmer's Favorites: Cleaning Tools. <https://go.uvm.edu/ffcleaningtools>
Thinking about upgrading your cleaning regimen? Start the season off with the investment of high-quality cleaning tools. Here are some of the favorites of other farming peers.
- New Episode of The Farmer's Share Podcast: Spring Kick-off: Young Farmer Check-in: EP6
<https://thefarmersshare.com/2023/04/24/spring-kick-off-young-farmer-check-in-ep6/>