



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – May 18, 2016
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Craftsbury) Mild and early spring conditions in April and May have provided us the time to overhaul our blueberry hillside, completing pruning, weeding and fertilizing earlier than ever. We held our annual Mulching Bee on May 7 and 40 helpers turned out to complete the job in 2 and 1/2 hours in exchange for season-long discounts on picking. Lots of early buds evidenced; no signs of over winter losses, despite deer population which yards nearby. We were delighted to find abundant honey bees active in the wild flowers. Now we need moisture and warmth.

(Elmore) Snow flurries on Sunday, 82 degrees on Thursday; mid-eighties on Saturday, 1-3 inches of snow predicted tonight. The tree blossoms do not know what to do, we do not either. Everyone wants to be outside growing, but we are wet and cold or sunburned, all at the same time. Garlic looks good and so do spring greens. Do not know if we will have a tree fruit crop, though. This is why we have dried fruit and jam, for the years when there is no fresh fruit due to the wild weather of the North.

(Cambridge) I planted a commercial sized-plot of rhubarb two years ago. Last summer they were looking great until the incessant rain in June. They developed a Fusarium rot and died back to the ground in July. I lamented that I was the only person on the planet who could kill rhubarb. Fast forward to this spring; almost all came up looking fine and healthy. The only issue now is that I had given them up for dead and hadn't cultivated toward the end of the season so now am dealing with perennial weeds. Lesson learned.

(New Haven) We're in pretty good shape for the start of the season. Plenty of sunshine has made it easy to find time to break new ground, till and prep beds. We got an awesome new manual plastic mulch layer from Johnny's that's saved us many hours of work already! We have a lot in the ground with more every day. We're still waiting to plant out our squash, but it's getting huge as are our tomatoes. We've been seeing a ton of flea beetles already and despite spraying Entrust, they are still going strong on our pak choy, radishes and Brassicas, with significant damage.

We're working on a liquid fertilizer this week with comfrey leaves, fish, kelp, and molasses. We're hoping to bring the health of the soil and plants into a better place to further address the insect problem. And will likely spray one more time and cover everything tightly. We're hoping to get into back fields soon to put in cover crops and seed crops, but they are clay and we haven't had enough of a dry period to have them seeded just yet. Overall the weather has been great this spring and we're feeling hopeful for a good growing season ahead!

In other news, we've been learning a lot about permits and licensing for Ag events and have run into a ton of red tape. We are working with our town on amending regulations and have a long way to go before we can be up and running with any agritourism, classes, events etc.

(Newbury) Garlic is looking very robust and we started harvesting asparagus this past week.

(Burlington) The faux warmup in early April led to our worst seed corn maggot problem in years: our entire planting of snap peas was wiped out. Lots of maggots — excuse me, larvae — in every pea I dug up. The good thing about the cool weather is that it hasn't delayed other pests too much; leek moth turned up late last week. CSA sales are strong, nearly at summer capacity. Cool spring has dug into our plant sales. Winter shares finished with a bang this week; seems like there is a nearly infinite capacity for greens, though the big four root vegetables of potatoes, sweet potatoes, carrots, and onions really provide the sustenance. Surprised that winter squash placed highly on our end-of-season survey, given how often we hear complaints about unused butternut.

(Northfield) Our shoulder season hoophouse greens have been significantly more productive than previous years, exceeding the benchmarks we use from elsewhere, perhaps due to finally dialing in our fertigation and foliar feeding. It seems too early to expect that our ton of rock dust (basalt and granite flours) in each house could yet have influence. Final yield numbers will be interesting. We are experimenting this year with more interplanting and companion planting. We have seeded some carrots between our heirloom tomato transplants which went out last week. Any Asian greens and lettuces who weren't in the direct line of the tomato trenches are still there, enabling a few additional harvests and hopefully shading out weeds. Lucky timing with rain and snow have made for excellent germination and first inches of growth of oat and pea cover crops. And we are getting ready to spread ramial chips (made last week from hardwood tops from a logging job completed in the days just prior to Irene that have hopefully been inoculated in the shade of the forest edge) between our deep raised beds in the hoop houses in the effort to control weeds, maintain moisture and promote fungal communities.

(Plainfield NH) Recent rains a godsend on our sandy soils. Cool weather has dampened gardening enthusiasm, so ornamental and vegetable pack sales have been muted. Proceeding cautiously with transplanting anything but Solanaceous crops and cucurbits until this weather warms up. Potatoes and onions finally in. Quackgrass is making a strong showing in the blueberries and continues to be our greatest weed challenge. Just beginning to set up irrigation in the strawberries, buds are in popcorn stage, coming along slowly, but plants looking better all the time. Need to go through them to deal with perennial weeds. Sitting more comfortably given the weather and ability to keep work organized in front of the help.

(Newburyport MA) Cold, dry spring. No winter snow plus no spring rain plus low dew points and desiccating wind equals dry soil. Irrigating before and after every planting slows down the process. Need some rain. Peas planted February 29 are in full bloom. Picking lots of greenhouse tomatoes, plus spinach, leeks, and green onions in the field. Planting unheated greenhouses with cucumbers, lunch box peppers, and tango celery. Field transplanting will resume once this cursed wind dies down. No apples, peaches or nectarines on this farm and many other southern New England farms. Pluots and Apriums trees killed dead from winter cold. Never seen this kind of winter kill in heavy wood before.

(Little Compton RI) A bunch of GH Tomato growers down our way had edema on some of their tomato varieties: Brandywines and Tomamaru Mucho. The leaf cells ruptured and turned brown, see: <http://pnwhandbooks.org/plantdisease/greenhouse-plants-tomato-oedema>. It is not a living disease but a reaction to environmental factors. It occurs when the air is cool and humid but soil is warm and moist, so the root system is pushing "too much" water up into the leaves and cells start to swell and "explode." It looks like hell but it is avoided by stopping or slowing down irrigation and promoting transpiration with good air circulation/ventilating and possible heating - to reduce humidity as much as possible till the weather changes. All those ruptured leaves should be removed, because the dead tissue will be good areas for Botrytis infections.

Another issue with greenhouse tomatoes this time of year is mobility of potash to the upper leaves and new fruit, which cause low leaves to yellow and turn bronze red. We found a product called: Natural Kelp and Sulfate of Potash 0-0-8. It is in a liquid form and has 2% Sulfur, 8% potash and other micronutrients from the Kelp. It is not OMRI approved yet but is approved by Washington State for organic production. I have heard Bay State Cert. will accept it. To find it Google: AG Grand: Kelp and liquid sulfate of Potash. In the fields: The rains have been good for starting seed but feel we are starting to lose ground again as in the last few years! Already have Meganets in the fields keeping the carrot plantings turgid.

TECHNICAL RESOURCES

Chris Callahan, UVM Extension Ag Engineer

Guidance on wash water discharge from vegetable pack sheds: <http://go.uvm.edu/vegwater>

Guidelines for selecting a good thermostat for agricultural use: <http://go.uvm.edu/thermostats>

Summary of materials available that provide a “smooth and cleanable” finish surface for coolers, wash areas, and pack sheds: <http://go.uvm.edu/smoothnclean>

A new Excel-based calculator to help size piping systems and to select pumps for heating systems and other water moving applications: <http://go.uvm.edu/pumpnpipe>

ON-FARM IRRIGATION WORKSHOP – TODAY!

Join Trevor Hardy of Brookdle Farm Irrigation, Joshua Faulkner of the VM Center for Sustainable Agriculture and David Marchant at Riverberry Farm from 3-6 pm in Fairfax, VT. Free.

BUS TOUR TO QUEBEC June 28

Cornell Extension has organized a bus tour of several Canadian farms in Quebec. Departure: 6:00 am from Albany, NY. Pick-ups in Saratoga, Glens Falls & Plattsburgh as needed. Return: 9:30 pm Albany. Reserve by May 23. See: <http://enych.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=568>