



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – May 25, 2015
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Shelburne/South Burlington) Despite the cold winter and the low harvests in February and March, the spinach yields ended up being equal to past years. We are just finishing ripping out the winter spinach now, later than usual, but the plants were still producing so much we chose to keep them in. We had no major spinach disease issues this winter and yields across all varieties were very similar. We really liked all varieties: Space, Raccoon, Corvair, Winter Bloomsdale. Kale also really rebounded and we just finished ripping out those plants. So, despite the rough winter, things have bounced back and the greenhouses are producing well and on track.

(Guilford) We had hoop house structure failure in high winds when we finally took our son away for April vacation and then bear destroyed hives (first visit in 15 years). We're solid two weeks behind. We've seen a notable/measurable increase in damaging winds across our main field in last 5 years after 40 years of growing - climate change? Got new strawberries in the ground just this week and the next day there were leaves up across the field. Amazing! Early strawberries fruit set; others full bloom - going to be an early year...freeze predicted for tomorrow though, fun for the whole family...off to a weird start and will be nice to get back into a groove. At least markets have been good and we have our health and humor and great birds this year appreciating our little paradise of flowers and fruit. But hope to hear VVBG advice on woodchuck eradication.

(Craftsbury) Completed first mowing of blueberry orchard and then had a "mulching bee" fueled by neighbors and volunteers. Great turn out and lots of enthusiasm for the upcoming season. Survey of field reveals, as always, lots of browsing by deer but also lots of buds and blossoms.

(Westminster West) Memorial Day and we have had only about 1 inch of rain in last 6 weeks. I don't remember a spring this dry ever. Been running drips to the garlic field which allows me to fertilize thru anyways and the garlic looks great. There was some loss over the winter due to extreme cold which never used to be a problem but now it is. Greenhouse tomatoes sizing up quick and winter squash plugs ready to go out to field, whenever I get the beds made. Greenhouse flats and pots keeps on growing despite our attempts to control the growth. Trucks out delivering 5 days a week and can barely keep up. It's really hard to run two different business: Produce and Greenhouse. They really conflict time wise this time of year. Hardly any bugs or disease issues in greenhouse this year, which is very nice. Here comes the crew, back to work!

(S. Royalton) I've never seen this before, it dropped 5 degrees in 30 minutes from 3:30 to 4 in the morning. We went from no dew and a slight breeze to an instant freeze. Damage everywhere but could have been worse as a rising sun saved us. Dry, dry, dry with low RH and sun; my sandy loam requires daily water to get transplants started. This makes three dry springs in a row for us. Farming gets harder every year, not because of my age but the weather is nuts.

(Huntington) Looking at a monthly precipitation map for New England, we are in one of the only swaths that has seen adequate rainfall; I hadn't realized that we were beneficiaries of such good fortune. It looks worse and worse the farther south and east one looks on the map. Even with "normal" precipitation, 3 of our first 5 spinach seedlings has gone into relatively dry ground. Surprisingly, our 800 ft. elevation mountain valley location did not get frosted during Friday night's cold front, though a few acres of row cover were deployed on newly transplanted winter squash as insurance. Our squash plants went in a few days before I would have preferred, with the cool, dry wind of this week causing severe windburn on the older (leggy) leaves. The young leaves and buds are looking fine, but I will be interested to see what the mortality rate is in the field. Greenhouse eggplant is in a house adjacent to last year's potato field, so we saw our first CPB last week. It sure has been good bare-fallowing weather.

(Plainfield) Greenhouse retail sales solid. Flea beetles under control in kale with one Entrust spray. Good soil moisture on sandy soils, due to some timely rains, some irrigation and lots of OM turned in over the years. Greenhouse tomatoes getting settled. Peppers and winter squash to go out this coming week. Finally got some hybrid green kale seed (FEDCO has Darkibor.) Letting my fall raspberries make a summer crop as an experiment. No sign of cane borer yet.

(Shrewsbury) Numerous blueberry branch lesions were diagnosed by Ann Hazelrigg last fall as hail damage from the May 2014 storm. At the time, small broken branches, destroyed leaves and blossoms were found everywhere. However, this spring we experienced much more branch die back than usual due to multiple branch lesions combined with a bitter winter. Medium sized dead branch clusters were removed from most older bushes. The plus side is that many of these older bushes needed thinning this spring anyway. Thanks to Ann for her expert diagnosis and insights.

(Marlboro) Lucked out the other night and we were spared the frost: low of 33. Half of the blueberries are in full blossom and hardy transplants are all in. We've never seen it so dry in the spring, though. Have had less than 0.2" of rain all of May. We've been spending way more time than we'd like watering, setting up irrigation and getting existing irrigation up and running. Some of the tender vegetable transplants are going in this week. They are ready and I am tired of babysitting them.

The new "glass house" is cranking out spinach, mesclun and kale allowing us to open the farm stand several weeks earlier than usual. It was built using windows which had lost their seal and came through the winter just fine. Cane borer is quite bad in the Prelude raspberries this year. I know I'm weeding them later than usual, so perhaps I haven't noticed other years and their vigor makes up for it.

(Dummerston) No frost here from the recent cold snaps. Lots of time spent covering though, not to mention irrigating. Cyclamen mites in the strawberries. I'll be trying Cucumeris predatory mites to control them. Rats got into every bag of ProGro in the toolshed: need some predators for them. CSA sales are catching up. With luck it might even fill up by the first pick-up. Cute goat babies hopping around the farm always helps.

(Plainfield NH) Scattered showers since snowmelt have not provided adequate moisture to plant, so we are irrigating like we haven't done in a good many years, both prior to planting and mulch laying as well as after. It stretches our labor force and is a huge added expense. What would a good solid inch of water be worth right now if we could buy it? Certainly many thousands of dollars. We have survived the past four frost events and look forward to getting some sleep. Much is in the ground and covered, bare ground corn is up, strawberries at maybe 40% bloom. Lots of winter kill. The first in years it has actually killed peach trees. Despite the snow cover, the blues and summer raspberries took significant hits as well. Some injury also due to voles, who seemed to frolic under the snow, but not widespread damage by them. Hoping the increasing number of raptors along the river will be well fed this summer. Greenhouse sales are off to a strong start for baskets, transplants and ornamentals; no doubt bolstered by pleasant weather of late.

(Salisbury NH) Dry, hot and windy, then cold: close to a frost. Put shade cloth on thinking the temps were way too high, then immediately the next day the temperature dropped. Might have to re-order onions, as could not irrigate. They look like almost a total loss. Leeks faring better as we had drip for them. Peas are struggling in dry, hot weather. Cukes and Partenon zucchini in hoop house look great. Beans, potatoes and corn are up. Asparagus beetles are terrible.

(Dresden ME) First corn transplants in with another 20,000 to transplant in next couple weeks. We set up irrigation over two weeks ago and have been watering our onion transplants (in silver mulch) with rain-birds on three inch pipe. Thinking of using 6 inch pipe if this week's storms don't produce ample rain for stale seed bedding our mid-season fields. Seeding is late on winter squash, pumpkins and gourds going in our mid-temp house early this week. Third planting of beans and peas this week. Just finished a prelim rebuild on our horse-drawn 1930's McCormick Deering Cultivator. We plan to use this on single row and two row crops on 36 inch beds with a combination of knives and finger weeders.

Early spring fallows on our winter squash and potato ground have been working well to reduce chickweed, lambsquarters and shepherd's purse which germinated early in the spring. Planned cover crops are a combination of Japanese millet, sun hemp, and sunflower. This will be grazed by the draft horses in late July and early August when the pastures slow. We had our first whole farm meeting two weeks ago and are working to establish systems of communication for employee and farm needs. We couldn't be more excited to be working with such a solid and engaged team.

(Little Compton RI) Of all our problems the wind continues to challenge us daily! 55 mph gusts and super dry wind really taking its toll this year. For the first time ever, I am pulling a crew member off planting and bed prep to just manage constant water needs: what a spring, and cold to boot. Really liking Dragoon and Breen small lettuces that can be planted real tight and give a great bang for the buck and bed space. I am still on the fence about Salanova.

(Argyle NY) Never seen such crazy spring weather! We only had 3/10 inch of rain since snowmelt and the irrigation pond is very low with daily water going on all fields. It has been easier getting crops seeded and cultivated without heavy rains but really want rain. Most crops doing well though flea beetles have come out so the 25gram netting (Biothrips) has been in use for several weeks on the arugula. It works much better for us than row cover. Our high tunnel crops of spinach, kale, chard, lettuce, salad mix and radishes are done or nearly done with summer crops transitioned in. Onions were just planted out on white plastic (Biotelo), which we found to be beneficial over the black last year. We have been blessed with a great crew this year.

SUMMER VEG AND BERRY FARM WORKSHOPS

NOFA-VT has worked with the VVBGA to organize these events. Dates and locations are listed at <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/?Page=meetlist.html>. Links with details to follow soon.

SOIL FERTILITY SURVEY

UVM Extension wants to better serve your soil fertility information needs. We've compiled a brief survey to get your input and to help us understand what practices and amendments growers across the state and the region are currently using. We'd be grateful if you take the survey soon. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/soilfert>