



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – June 8, 2010

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Royalton) Eggplants are being hit hard by potato beetles. We're diligently pulling volunteer potatoes from last year's crop out; hopefully everyone else affected by the blight is doing that, too. The field tomatoes are planted and doused with compost tea, as are the winter squash, melons, cukes and summer squash. Onions are loving this weather, and weed suppression is great with the biodegradable mulch. Snap peas are producing lots of sweet pods in the hoop house, and the string beans are flowering. Bok choy is beginning to bolt, as is the arugula. Asparagus beetles are pretty bad. Began haying three weeks earlier than in any of the past 12 years. Strawberries are plumping up but still a ways off from ripening. It looks like the black currants got hit pretty heavily from the frost in April. Is anyone else noticing how many flowers are on the blackberries this year?

(Westminster West) Cucumber beetles and squash bugs invaded our greenhouse zucchini crop in mid May. Set out all winter squash and pumpkins then had a tremendous downpour to water them all in, a much needed rain. Garlic looks amazing with scapes already popping out, the bulbs already look huge. Still strong sales for our herbs and veggie packs although the farmers' market is off quite a bit from last year. Somehow everything needs to get done all at the same time: weed, plant, ship and sell stuff and run the irrigation lines. Oh yeah, try to have fun and enjoy life! The best thing we did this year is buying several walkie talkies to keep in touch with each other, saves so much time!

(Plainfield) Nice Mix of rain and sunny days. Transplanting is going well. Much cultivation and hand weeding needed next week. Love that Einbok tine-weeder on new strawberries and potatoes. TPB counts still under 0.5 per cluster. Lots of perfectly formed little green berries. Will spray again next week, trying for every 5 days. Greenhouse sales are winding down after a solid Memorial Day weekend. Preparing fields for fall cabbage, kale and broccoli. Oats, buckwheat and peas going in before late lettuce.

(Randolph Center) Crops coming along nicely, baled some straw already, first cut hay on high dry land has been light. Last week we tried out the deep zone builder from UVM Extension with good results. It eliminated the work of three tillage passes (subsoil, chisel plow, finishing pass) in one smooth trip. Pumpkins and winter squash planted into the zones are fully emerged in 5 days. Just the time savings alone could be justification enough to move in this direction, without even taking into account the agronomic benefits. My reluctance to even consider reduced tillage on our heavy soils has evaporated after seeing the finished product.

(Moretown) Cucumber Beetles! They are back and mean business. I sprayed Pyganic twice already and it does not seem to be working. Will try Surround next. Radishes and snap peas are coming along great.

(Grand Isle) As asparagus season 2010 draws to a close, we would evaluate this year's crop as "fair". Asparagus is not a fan of hot and dry conditions. In retrospect we remember the ideal asparagus conditions of 2009 with lots of cool and wet weather. We are extra busy setting out seedlings of all kinds and some of the early varieties of strawberries are tasty and red. We expect yields from these first berries to be down as some blossoms were lost in several nights of frost even though they were under row cover. At coffee break on the farm recently everyone started telling their philosophic views of vegetable farming. One person said "it's all timing" another said "it is either too wet or too dry or too hot or too cold". A third person said "it's a case of blind ignorance since every spring you come back for more with great high hopes for the perfect year." But none of this truly explains why we love it so!

(Little Compton RI) It has been dry so we have spent a fair amount of time getting drip irrigation up and running. It seems to be paying off. We keep rouging out volunteer potatoes out of old potato land. We are especially vigilant this year. We still grow our first crop under plastic and green sprout them as well. We invested in some row covers and hopefully will have potatoes with carrots and peas on the fourth of July. I heard rumors at a winter conference about an OMRI approved prill version of copper hydroxide and just heard from our provider that it is not happening this season. So it is back to NuCop 50WP. Besides working well to prevent late blight on potatoes last year, it did remarkably well with pepper diseases. We got into a habit of spraying Oxidate in the morning when we sprayed Nu Cop in the afternoon and had clean peppers all season. One sanitizes and the other protects. Important to note you can't mix them together.

(Wolcott) Rain has been most welcome, as we don't have irrigation. But now the crops and weeds are all growing at an equally whopper pace and we're trying to keep up with the cultivation. Have just one more acre of squash to plant. The Brassicas are mostly in full flower and we're looking for wild bees to come out and pollinate them but the cool weather is keeping them in. Luckily our purchased bees will be here soon. This year we're trying a new source of purchased bees: bumblebees instead of honeybees. Bumblebees seem like a better fit for us because they really like squash, which honeybees don't, and also they don't live through the winter (other than the queen) so you don't have to try to keep them alive for months on end. They're much better able to tolerate stress and small spaces, so they work much better in pollination cages. We're purchasing little mini hives for our pollination cages and then a really big hive for our hybrid squash field where the seed value warrants the investment.

(Bath, MI) Go figure that three weeks ago we could be outside weeding at 6am with no shirt on and this morning it was chilly in a sweatshirt. In the tunnel sweet potatoes went in last week and are starting to push new leaves, purple beans ('Burgundy') are flowering, and there are good size green tomatoes on both the slicers and the cherries. We are hoping to harvest our first ones in two weeks or so and by the end of the month should have enough production to start selling. Dino and 'Red Russian' kale and Swiss chard are still going strong inside and the last of the head lettuce should be harvested out this week or next. A planting of Pro Cut series sunflowers meant for a new farmers market that starts on July 15th are just coming up too. In the field, potatoes have been hilled once and are ready to get it again, and carrots and beets are ready to be thinned. Tomatoes and peppers are starting to grow nicely and cukes, zucchini, and yellow squash were transplanted and seeded 10 days ago. We are trying 'Jericho' and 'Yugoslavian Red' lettuces in the field to see how they take the summer heat and they are up and growing. Taste will be the decider on those two. Asparagus is weeded and we should be able to harvest from about 160 row feet for the first time next year. Happy with the rain we've gotten over the past week but ready for it to dry up a bit.

(Salisbury NH) We got through the very cold period and then the high temps for a while. Cut worms doing well this year; we've already seen a few Colorado potato beetles and the cucumber beetles found the hoop house and made a mess of our transplants. Planted 500 Seascape strawberries and thought I'd put paper/cardboard and then straw between rows to keep the weeds at bay but it was dry and then windy the next day so it was blown all over. Still trying to get volumes up for supplying restaurant and co-op. Bought Johnny's 6 row seeder but there certainly is a trick to using it. Someone suggested that after making a raised bed and smoothing it, we should take a landscape roller tool used for lawns to pack the dirt lightly. We tried just making a raised bed and smoothing it but the seeder the wheels didn't spin consistently. Maybe at a twilight meeting someone can share the secrets of that tool! Had a few sales to customers that know us and come up even though we haven't hung our open sign. We appreciate the notes from the field: learn a lot, laugh a lot and feel relief to know that even the big guys have problems too.

TWILIGHT WALK AT JOHNNY'S SEEDS JUNE 30

Johnny's Selected Seeds will host a twilight walk on June 30th, 5-7:30pm, that will highlight: onions in quick hoops trial; hoop house plantings; herbs; early lettuce and greens trials; mulch trials; and caterpillar tunnel trials. The research farm is located on Foss Hill Road, Albion, Maine. For directions see <http://www.johnnyseeds.com> or call 877-564-6697.

SWEET CORN TWILIGHT MEETING JUNE 16

Hank Bissell of Lewis Creek Farm will show how he uses the growth and development of corn plants in his fields to determine planting dates for his different blocks of corn. Hank also uses the Pre-Sidedress Nitrate Test to determine if his corn has enough nitrogen and cover crops are an important part of his rotation. This year he is also trialing sweet corn planted in a deep zone tillage system. *Directions: Take VT Route 116 to the village of Starksboro. In the center of the village the farm is on the west side of the road. Park at the farmstand.* Sponsored by the VT Vegetable & Berry Growers Association, NOFA-VT and UVM Extension, and Risk Management Agency. Free for VV&BGA members and VOF certified farmers, \$10 for NOFA members or apprentices, \$15 others.

YOUR CHANCE TO COMMENT ON FRESH PRODUCE FOOD SAFETY ISSUES

The deadline has been extended until July 23 to share your views with the Food and Drug Administration before they develop safety standards for fresh produce. They seek specific recommendations in categories such as: the role of the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) guidelines, how to coordinate produce food safety practices with sustainable and/or organic production methods, environmental and/or conservation goals or practices, and existing government regulations. Comments can be submitted electronically at <http://www.Regulations.gov>. Click on 'submit a comment' box at top, then enter the docket number FDA-2010-N-0085 in the 'keyword' field. You can then click the link to the background info on left, and click submit a comment link on the right. To submit comments by mail, be sure to include the docket number at the top of the pages you send to: Division of Dockets Management, HFA-305, Food and Drug Administration, 5630 Fishers Lane, Room 1061 Rockville, Maryland 20852.