



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – September 5, 2023
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Johnson) Good news: We are doing better than I thought we would since the flood. Farmstand has been busy and some greenhouse crops, lettuce, and beets are coming back.

Bad news, even the crops we had above flood waters are in terrible shape. Only got about 10% percent yield out of our 6 acres of winter squash and pumpkins. Plants just died, fruit rotted, rained just about every day here. Potatoes are suspected to have late blight. Trying to treat and get what we can out of them. Worst farming year ever, looking forward to 2024.

(Guildhall) Not too bad out here, on balance anyway. Of 52 acres of potatoes, 12 flooded and died, 20 look like a below average yield, and 20 look phenomenal. Fungicide applications seem to have worked, so that's something. We're already digging reds for fresh orders; demand is much higher than usual. We tried a lot of new-to-us varieties this year, but varietal comparisons have been nixed due to the way different fields behaved in such an unrelentingly wet year.

(Westminster) Since the first of June, our farm hasn't gone more than three days without rain – and the sun didn't always shine on those days. But despite losing 75 percent of our winter squash crop and other weather losses in broccoli, and lettuce with bottom rot, things are looking up for the fall. Kale and lettuce plantings look great, and we have a plethora of purple daikon, watermelon radish, rutabaga, and purple-top turnip.

Our storage red cabbage won't do well, mostly because of the variety – we've yet to find something that stores well. The green cabbage looks good, however. And we should have a great crop of storage carrots, although beets grew poorly this year.

We've started seeding cover crops, concentrating on rye/vetch and peas/oats to provide fertility. That will help replace the manure and compost we have less access to. We've also found a local supplier of organic fertilizer, giving us more flexibility in ordering and securing fertilizer.

(Huntington) Writing this on a blazing hot Monday afternoon following seven gloriously rainless days. It seems weird to report that we received 29.8" of rain from June 7 through August. VTDigger said the Barre-Montpelier airport broke a record with 22" during that same time span. Most crops are doing OK, though the only crop that I would say has been above average would be sweet corn, and I have no explanation for how that's possible, except supposing that corn is actually more of a moss than a C4 grass.

Onions were meh, early returns on winter squash are somewhat below average, and potatoes look surprisingly decent, though definitely not yields to brag about. Fall brassica transplants seemed to like the rain, as did our late beet/carrot seeding. Direct seeded greens were garbage all summer, though luckily those crops are very minor for us.

I've been scrambling in the shop to finish building a potato flamer to follow our flail mower during vine killing. In years like this with "above average" weed pressure, the hope is we'll be able to flame the valleys and sides of the hills to kill weeds, remnant beetles, and prostrate potato vines.

Overall, top-dressing extra fertility, increased spray frequencies, and only moderately effective cultivation have added quite a bit to this year's growing expenses. I hope everyone had some luck in getting their fall plantings in following July's floods.

(East Montpelier) Pumpkin and raspberry crops total failure this year due to too much rain. Pumpkins had good foliage and flowered quite a bit, but gourds never emerged. Plants still look good and blooming but no fruit, seem to be mostly male flowers. Potatoes rotted due to too much rain. Delicata crop slowly coming in. Butternut squash overtaken by slugs.

Sunflowers were shorter and bloomed nearly 4 weeks later than schedule due to rain and lower than usual temps. Second sunflower planting succession no germination due to seeds rotting from too much rain. Zinnias and marigolds are prolific and happy, but we've got Japanese beetle damage on their leaves which we never had previously. Grasshoppers are also doing a number on the sunflowers. Cucumber abundance, they seem to love the wet weather, but zucchinis crapped out early. Big puddles and soggy fields are all about.

(E. Wallingford) Still picking beautiful blueberries. Thanks to my Helena Chemical rep who came out many times to check crops, deliver product, did soil samples, due back next week for leaf samples. Picked our Elliotts for PYO on Labor Day weekend as well as some mid-season varieties.

Pumpkins starting to run and make fruit; will see if there is enough growing season left. Not much winter squash. Tomatoes finally ripening. All replanted veggies look better with sunshine and might make a crop with the warm weather this week.

Renting a row mulcher from OESCO this fall for blueberries if anyone wants to use it while the mulcher is in VT. Reach out me at sugarhillberryfarmllc@gmail.com, or OESCO directly. Usually do this the end of October once leaves are off.

(Marlboro) Some observations on SWD control in our blueberries and raspberries: The SWD netting has been superb. Very little SWD under the net even into September, great berries on Bluecrop and Nelson. It is 85-gram netting for longevity (we hope), in its second year.

Spray schedule this year on the uncovered berries: first Entrust applied July 19, second Entrust July 27. These worked reasonably well and kept damage manageable except in the Bluegray.

Maybe because the Blueray is earlier than the Bluecrop, maybe they have a thinner skin, maybe they are a bit darker in color and attract more? If we plant more, we will consider replacing Blueray with Bluecrop. Bluegold has also held up better to SWD. Third spray applied August 9, Pyganic, not expecting the same efficacy but hoped for some. Then another Entrust spray as the crop is ripening.

Lost most of the uncovered berries starting around mid-August but the sprays certainly saved us much of a month of decent picking. All in all a successful blueberry year and a good learning experience. Very poor raspberry crop, but the sprays kept SWD from wiping it out.

(Westminster West) While not flooded by rivers or streams we did have our soil drainage system fail so huge amounts of rainwater backed up into our fields for weeks. We've been unable to cultivate, and orchard grass quickly overwhelmed the potatoes and smothered 65% of the crop. Grateful we can get good potatoes from a drier field.

On a positive note, most other crops have done well, grown on plastic in raised beds they thrived once the rains stopped. Harvesting winter squash now to fill huge orders. Cabbage, onions, celery loved the water. This has been an easy year in terms of insect problems. No squash bugs or cucumber beetles, no hornworm, little CPB, yes cabbage worms but weekly Dipel sprays were adequate for control. Some disease issues from saturated soils, but localized.

Root crops look good; carrots loved the rain! Garlic crop is selling steady with much seed grade gone and local stores buying steadily. Renting out some acreage to a chicken and egg operation that moves the flock daily to fresh ground, leaving their droppings for us; it seems like a nice fit and happy to see animals on this farm again!

(Greenfield Center NY) Blueberry crop yield ran about 60% of normal, it was a hard year with freeze, and then drought in first half of season. Second half of season was constant rain, resulting in late berries that were very soft, and prone to dropping off plant early, mostly unsaleable.

Freeze resulted in about a 10% loss of new blueberries planted on April 3, first time we had a loss in a new planting. Damage was dramatic, leaves turned brown and dropped off in two weeks after freeze, some grew new leaves and survived, some grew new leaves then died, some never recovered at all. Constant rain has resulted in wet fields, making tractor field work impossible at times. The good news is that demand for product was strong.

(Argyle NY) We have been fortunate to not get as much rain as some areas, but still been a challenging growing season, especially with diseases. The strawberry tips we have done successfully for over 15 years came with a heavy infestation of Anthracnose and the losses are about 50% of the crop. Have a few biological control options so will see. Chandler plugs we planted in the tunnel in November last year (very late) produced nicely in May, so we will try a few more sections this winter.

Most crops, including weeds, are growing great. We are on rescue missions for some! Most of the issue is lack of workers (and us aging) but slowly catching up; we reduced our field plantings and will rely on other farmers for fall brassicas and winter roots, etc. for our online store.

Potatoes are looking great with no leafhopper to speak of, which is unusual. Flea beetles have disappeared (so wonderful) and fall greens look good though spinach germination was not great. Our final field bean patch is beautiful, the Lutz winter beets are over 3 feet tall, and winter squash is ripening early. Leeks are weeded and netting is on to protect against allium leaf miner, which has been bad here.

We have seeded a lot of greens for the winter tunnels, and continuing succession plantings of lettuce, etc. Transitions will happen this month as many summer crops have died, though celery, eggplants, tomatoes, and peppers are prolific with weekly fertilizing through the dosatron helping. A late planting of pole beans looks good, as are late cucumbers and summer squash. Will see how they do!

Sales have been steady to our loyal customers, and our switch to a full delivery loop every other week is working well. We (our son) started a new enterprise with deliveries to NYC CSAs every other week--testing its viability.

(Little Compton RI) Hard to believe anyone in New England has to irrigate but fall crops now need of adequate moisture to finish, and we expect 80~90 F for the next five days. Thankful that we set up drip under raised bed plastic at the start of the season.

The good amount of rain during the summer sure setup the fall nectar plants like goldenrod and Japanese knot weed for our bees. October should bring in good honey.

Got our onions harvested just in time as neck rot was showing up. I can tell already this crop won't be for sale in March. Hoping winter squash has a better storage life.

Trico deer repellent is still the bright spot in our deer management. Since it is not approved for organic production, we spray it only on the entrance routes and perimeters of our fields. On our conventional leeks and Brussels sprouts goes right on the crop. We did have some leaf damage when we put Nu~film P in the mix tank.

GH Tomatoes all went down to Fulvia and Botrytis. Next season we will grow fewer rows so we can get in there to deliver a combo of Double Nickel and NuCop. Bought a Wizard vacuum seeder and going through a learning curve but the accuracy of seed placement is miles ahead of our old three-joint Jang system. Steaming greenhouse soils for winter greens starts next week.

Farmers market sales are strong.

\$10K GRANTS TO COVER WEATHER RELATED LOSSES IN JULY AND AUGUST

The Vermont Community Foundation allocated \$1 million to a [Farm Disaster Relief Grant Program](#) to addresses needs of Vermont farms that sustained damage from storms and flooding in July and August. Up to \$10,000 per farm may be requested. The application is relatively simple. Round 1 deadline: September 6, 2023, 5 p.m. Round 2 deadline: September 27, 2023, 5 pm. Applications can be submitted online or on paper (by request).

A farm is eligible if: It is located in Vermont and the land is owned or leased by Vermont resident(s). It is committed to remaining in business. It sustained damage in July and/or August 2023. It has at least 20 percent of income coming from agricultural activities (supported by tax documentation). New farms that began operations in 2023 are eligible if they can demonstrate investment and potential for growth. Nonprofits managing farm operations are eligible if they can demonstrate investment and potential for growth.

NOFA-VT FARM BEGINNINGS AND JOURNEY FARMER PROGRAM

News for all aspiring and beginning farmers in Vermont: Applications for both these year-long programs are now open. The deadline is September 11. For more info see www.nofavt.org/farm-beginnings and <https://nofavt.org/journey-farmer>. Questions? Contact Megan at megan@nofavt.org or 802-434-7180

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 20, 4-6 pm. [VVBGA workshop](#). Evening Song Farm, Shrewsbury, VT. Topics: No till organic growing, reducing erosion on a slope, fall tunnel plantings. This diversified organic farm uses mulches, fabrics, cover crops, and no-till to reduce soil loss and improve soil health. The farm also produces crops year-round in the tunnels, and this workshop will feature the transition of summer to fall crops.

December 6-7. High Tunnel Production Conference. Fireside Inn and Suites, West Lebanon, NH. Stay tuned for program information.