

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – January 19, 2010

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Westminster West) We're putting finishing touches on new 40'x96 Harnois greenhouse. Installed new Modine infinity 93% efficient heater, looks great. Water heated rolling benches, all the candy a grower like me always wanted. Interviewing new staff for the season, had great response using local list serve. Actually started planting this year's pansy and viola crop. Starting herb cuttings as well. Still working on this year's plans, trying to analyze last year's amazing results; can we repeat, can we do better, do we want to? Growth is a double edge sword. I do love the pace of the winter months, time to think, plan and spend time with family and friends. We are blessed!

(West Rutland) Growing two new varieties of garlic for me this year: Bavarian white and Russian red. No idea how they will grow but giving it a shot. Firewood is ready for the greenhouses and I am hoping for a good spring, keep positive.

(Craftsbury) The new year is in full swing already. Getting together potting soil, planning starts, selling storage crops and winter greens, tuning furnaces, sneaking in the occasional ski and trip away. It's a full time occupation now-be aware of that as you make changes that extend your season. Buying all I can on Craigslist; use Searchtempest, it allows you to search Craigslists all over the country. You can kill some time buying equipment this way but there are some hot deals out there. Hoping to make wise decisions this season so that we don't have the four crop failures on key items that we had last year.

(Little Compton RI) We are finally taking a breather and doing our last farmers' market of the season. It was our second season and much was learned. The two biggest takeaways: Get a lot more seeding and sequence charting of seeding done in the late August/September period. And second, plan on banking crops of spinach in the December/January period so you have plenty of spinach to supply your markets. By planting a lot more extra spinach you will have ample supply for your markets without the stress of waiting for it to re-grow, which won't happen till February anyway

(Rochester) Most of our raspberries will need to be replaced over the next couple of years so we will be doing an experimental planting of seven varieties, to see what else might thrive in our almost-zone-three conditions. We are most excited about early fall-bearers, especially Polana which should fruit in mid-August. It will require more fertilization than the others but we can manage that through our drip irrigation (we use liquid marine emulsion) and it should extend our summer raspberry season nicely. In blueberries we will be trying some Northblue for their hardiness and reputedly high yield. Some fast-growing sweet sap silver maples will be going in by the customer parking area to give us future shade and hopefully nice sap in as little as ten years. We aim to bring in bumblebees (from Koppert) to strengthen blueberry pollination. We have been relying mostly on wild bumblebees since the honey bees spend all their time among the dandelions and raspberries, but wild bee numbers were not sufficient last year for our early-blooming Patriots (due to a warm April) and pollination was incomplete.

The commercially-reared bumblebees will be insurance. I am told that if we create suitable habitat, some of them may winter over, so we aim to do that by making nesting blocks which should at least help orchard mason bees. Late frosts last year cost us at least half of our summer raspberries so we are investigating a PTO fan for the tractor as well as a generator-powered fan to mount on a trailer. We have three couples lined up to camp on our land over the summer (we have three full-hookup RV sites). They will pick berries for us in exchange for their stay, guaranteeing us 640 hours of labor for the cost of electricity and trash disposal. We are looking forward to the new season with hope and excitement, in a way that probably only a farmer can understand. Whatever happens, it has to be better than last year, right?

(Cambridge) I did a little experiment with cover cropping this fall. I start to get heavy deer browsing in late October. I wasn't sure just how much biomass I was losing so this year in late September I mowed two out of three mature stands of peas and oats and left the third one standing. As usual the deer came in and ate just about the entire area of standing peas and oats. In the mowed sections, the cut peas and oats remained untouched and lay on the surface in between the stubble, keeping soil etc. in place. You can't even see the soil in the mowed sections while it is quite visible between the chewed stubble in the non mowed area. The biomass in the mowed sections is still there breaking down under the snow while the biomass from the standing section basically walked off the field. I'll be mowing every September from now on.

(Durham CT) Two more weeks and we should be seeing re-growth from greens that were harvested earlier! That will mean a return of kale and claytonia, both of which were picked clean by the end of December. Spinach, which is mostly Renegade, Samish and 7green are doing great. Recently we spent two days cultivating all the chickweed out of the rows. We should have plenty of crop for the two winter markets that we go to each week. Trying to figure out a good way to irrigate soon, as that has prevented aphids in the past. I attended a workshop on high nutrient density growing and would be interested in what any of you think of this method of growing.

(Argyle NY) The Farmers' Market customer support has been tremendous all winter, and the customers are especially thrilled to have lots of greens. We've had kale, Swiss chard, Asian Greens, lettuce mix, spinach, and bunches of turnips consistently until this week. Now with the cold and little sun, the re-growth with no heat in the high tunnels is very slow. Spinach will still be in good supply as we grow a lot and stockpile it for Jan-Feb. Each winter has more learning curves and we are doing great with no diseases and excess moisture by keeping one vent open in the end peak all the time. One or 2 layers of Rowcover are used and they are taken off when it's above freezing in the tunnels.

Lots of root crops as well, and cabbage: red (Super 80) and green (Reaction), Brussels sprouts, radishes, and celeriac add to the diversity. All are holding great in the environmentally controlled root cellar. Sweet potatoes sold well and are storing good. Winter squash continues to go down with rot as it has been all fall. It would be nice to know why? All others in area seem to be doing the same. Starting to seed new crops for the tunnels like broccoli raab, Happy Rich Broccoli, Asian greens, etc. in trays to transplant out. Good snow cover and too many deer; some folks are enjoying venison from nuisance permits, but the deer herds keep coming back! Hoping to see more sun and warmer days, although skating has been great on the pond.

(Montpelier) Well a bit of an odd winter so far here in Vermont. Very little snow, some very cold temperatures, and a huge lack of sun. Winter salad/spinach has been good but could have been better with a bit of sun. Soil temperature is 5 degrees below where it normally is in the greenhouses. Spinach is doing just fine and demand at market remains nice and strong. Value added product is the new push, in particular soup. Hot by the cup, frozen quarts, and wholesale. What a great way to use culls and #2 product. Last year's big greenhouse drainage project looks to be having a great impact so far. The real test will be this spring and hopefully the resulting drier growing environment and less disease and aphids. This year's big project will be to focus on just growing, taking a break from large capital improvements. Need to step back and work with what I have and really get everything up to its full potential. Farm "crew" is hired and already helping out. Excited about the upcoming season as always and the promise it holds. Forever an optimist although realism tends to creep in around the edges and temper things a bit more.

(Westfield) Love to report something, but we haven't a clue what we are doing yet, but once we figure it out, we'll be reporting.

GROWERS WANTED FOR DAY NEUTRAL STRAWBERRY ORDER

Wanted: growers that might be interested in some dayneutral strawberries from Lassen Canyon Nurseries in California (www.lassencanyonnursery.com). I need to get enough order to fill a pallet, which is 30 plus boxes of 1000 plants per box. I don't need many plants myself this year, but I still want to get a few and also try some new varieties. The varieties would certainly include Seascape (that one seems to be the best for the Northeast right now), Albion and then there are 3 new ones just released for trial: Monterey, San Andreas and Portola. I think we could have any of these but am not sure. I will contact Lassen Canyon when I get enough orders to fill a pallet. Black River Produce has been bringing them East for me other years and I am hoping they will do it again this year. Thanks, Bob Gray, 4 Corners Farm, S. Newbury. fourcornersfarm@earthlink.net or (802) 866-3342.

LOCAL DISTRIBUTOR SEEKS VERMONT PRODUCE

From: Louise Calderwood. A small distributor named Bernard Earl is currently distributing VT apples and VT potatoes to schools, senior centers, and small stores in northern VT. He is interested in carrying more VT products and can accommodate very small quantities. During the summer months he will also develop a road side stand in Wolcott. He is interested in developing relationships with VT producers for wholesale purchases both for his distribution route and for his roadside stand. The best way to reach Bernard is 888-3953 in the evenings.

REMINDER: REGISTER FOR VT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWERS MEETING

The annual meeting will take place on Feb 1 at the Capital Plaza Hotel in Montpelier – details at: http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/meetings/VVBGA_Feb10_Montpelier.pdf. Pre-registrations are due January 28; you can walk in, too but there is an additional \$5 per person charge.