

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – January 26, 2009

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This is a special e-mail only newsletter (i.e. no more 'Agriview' issues printed this month); if you know growers that do not get this newsletter by e-mail but should, please have them contact me.

WINTER GROWER REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Burlington) Our winter share program is continuing to work out well. We're in our 'no greens' phase of the CSA share, looking forward to later February when our spinach crop picks back up in the greenhouse. Skipped three weeks of distribution over Christmas and New Year's for the first time -- a nice break for us and CSA members tired of roots, squash, and cabbage. Happy to have added Napa cabbage as a storage item this year; stored well in bulk bins until now. Scorzonera and salsify surprising popular as novelty crops choices for members. Supplies of most crops are holding well, though midwinter Butternut cull rates seem to be running a bit over 10% this year as opposed to our more typical 5%. It could be more surface disease organisms due to a wet summer, or perhaps due to somewhat less mature squash going into storage? Testing a surface treatment with StoroX or equivalent material might help answer that question in the future.

(Westminster West) Besides being crazy cold, things are actually looking up here. Great germination on pansies and violas. Parsley, thyme and rosemary starting to root out well on the heated propagation benches. I'm putting finishing touches on this year's plans for crops, anticipating growth and sort of ignoring the economic storm raging all around. Purchasing a larger diesel truck to keep up with deliveries so hope I'm right. Just returned from a trip down the Mexican west coast, its great seeing agriculture in other countries. Can you believe inter cropping Coconuts, corn and lemon trees in the same field! Maybe we should try that, ha ha.

(East Montpelier) The really cold weather has done damage to some of the greenhouse greens while others are holding up really well. So far the biggest temperature difference I have seen is at 7:30am it was 5 below outside and under the row cover in I had 32 degrees already. Harvesting is still going on but in very small quantities; just enough to bring to market every 2 weeks. The plan next year is to transplant 2-3 weeks later and not sell anything during the month of October and the first part of November. I am hoping this will carry me to March. Also going to try a few of the Arnold's field tunnels with kale and chard in them. Downy mildew is still an issue but under control with the Milstop and Cease combination. I have some Lola Rosa that has come back incredibly well and is growing out nicely. It will be ready towards the end of February. Typically Mid-March everything is going full tilt again. Overwintering herbs in a couple of small beds appear to be doing well, parsley and thyme in particular. The chives, sage, and oregano are just sitting there for now. It will be interesting to see what they do in March. Fresh herbs at market for March and April will be greatly appreciated I think. Seeds are in and it's almost time to start plug production.

(Argyle NY) The cold, cloudy weather for most of the past three weeks has slowed the production of greens in our 2 high tunnels (30' by 144') down to half, but we still continue to harvest spinach, kale, Swiss chard, and Asian Greens weekly, with no heat. There has been no damage to any crops with our

many nights below zero (minus 16 was the low) with triple P19 rowcover. Even the Five Star Johnny's lettuce mix is surviving fine, but not growing very much. Cornell University lent us over 40 Spectrum Watchdog data loggers that monitor temperature, so we are conducting our own experiment for 3 months on our farm and to a small degree, 2 other farms. Our main goal is to determine how different applications of hoops and rowcovers affect the soil and air temperatures in the tunnels. The Watchdogs we have are programmed to record the temperature every hour for the next three months, then the data will be downloaded at Cornell, and we'll hopefully have some great data to share with everyone that is growing in tunnels over the winter. The 2 other farms involved with the data loggers have heat in the soil. We used some Biotello (corn starch based) black plastic on a few rows of the greens, and our own observations (and temperature gun) show that soil to be the warmest by about 5 degrees on those cold mornings.

The farmers' markets continue to be very strong and there is a demand for more and more greens. We are selling our spinach in ¼ lb. vented bags for \$3 (\$12 per lb) and mesclun (lettuce mix and four Asian greens) is also sold in ¼ lb bags, but is \$4 each or \$16 per pound. Swiss chard, kale and Asian Green bunches are weighed out at .45 lb and sold for \$3 (almost \$7 per pound). With the greens and about 10 root cellar crops, markets are still very lucrative, pay the bills, and keep a full-time intern busy! The winter leeks are still out there under rowcover and a foot of snow! Where is the January thaw, or at least a day above 32 degrees to melt some ice?

(Benson VT) We have been growing inside 2500 sq.ft. all winter so far. Glad to have some strong sunshine. We are harvesting a couple hundred lbs of microgreens and sprouts a week. Quality is good. We are opening up a second building to have a total of 5000 sq. ft. of heated space. It will fill up fast with herbs and more greens. We've been experimenting with supplemental lighting and also an insulation blanket material. Coldframes are minimally productive but anxious to get back into them early spring. We've been working out the kinks with our new heating system and having mixed feelings about it overall. On the one hand we are using a lot of wood but on the other we have had great results on the very coldest of nights. We are still experimenting a trying different ways to conserve wood and maximize the furnace efficiency. We'd be happy to talk to any of you who are considering wood heat for your greenhouses. Looking forward to longer days and hopefully an early spring. (editor's note – see the case study on this heating system called 'log wood gasification' at: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/CaseStudies.html>)

(Little Compton RI) We are finishing up our first year of winter growing. Among our successes was the response to our produce at the Winter Farmers market in Pawtucket, RI; Farm Fresh R.I. (our local state farmers support group) pulled together an amazing feat finding a wonderful indoor market in a newly renovated 19th century factory. We planted many greens and different types of spinach. Our successes were white lady turnips (harvested with gumdrop size turnips and beautiful greens), three different kinds of beets, which gave us beautiful greens and gumdrop sized beets, arugula, red mustard, Miners Lettuce, broccoli rabe, Japanese red radishes, French D'Avignon radishes, and some Johnny's salad mixes. Water cress did very well. Red bok choy amazed us all, black summer bok choy did well, too. Our bunches of greens sold for \$2.25; all spinach and mesclun were \$12.50/lb. but this was too cheap as thirty pounds was gone in one hour. We had parsnips, potatoes, carrots, cabbages, collard, kale, Dino kale etc. from storage and from row-covered covered fields but it was the fresh greens that drove all the sales.

Failures! Number one was getting cyclamen mites on our spinach. We're still trying to figure out how this happened. We started the spinach as plugs in another house last fall possibly some plants were infected there. We are very concerned about this. The eggs look like minute droplets of water on the backs of the leaves. They are different than the look of water droplets because they are perfectly round and won't rub off. The leaves also get distorted and twist and curl left or right and the leaf has a mottled look to it. Our management for mites is to alternate between freezing and heating (when the weather gives us a break) as much as we can before the tomatoes go in March 21st. And we don't leave as much as a blade of grass in there for pests to get a toe hold on. Voles are another big problem and must be handled early or they ruin root crop like our beets and white turnips. When we enter the greenhouse we can see hundreds of them running under the row cover.

(Durham, CT) We've sold most of our greens that were planted in the fall of '08. In a week or two, regrowth of existing plants will let us get back to selling winter greens. That marks the end of the Persephone Period that Eliot Coleman often talks about: more than 10 hours of daylight and the beginning of serious photosynthesis. We'll be planting bok choy, spinach and kale both in the ground and in cells within the week. Not sure which method will work best for us. Even in the middle of winter, spring seems right around the corner

(Middle Granville, NY) Our tunnels are doing OK; here's what's in them: Hoophouse 1: kale/scallions- kale is mostly harvested- will be tilling in the text week or so and putting greens in. Hoophouse 2: spinach- very poor germination last fall and didn't get to fill in with transplants- pretty much picked down now. High Tunnel 1, unheated: spinach germinating now from a late November seeding; it will have greens transplanted in next week. High Tunnel 2, main house with ground heat installed running at temps around 50 or so and double ty-par-518 covering over crops: greens, spinach, a few Swiss chard, lettuce mix just transplanted in for March harvest. Some of the greens are currently on a 3 to 4 week regrowth cycle. Just installed a new rowcovering system- we'll see how it works.

(Bath, MI) Cold temps for us (-12F or so) and cloudy weather had us skipping harvest last week for the first weather-related time this winter, but higher temps and sunshine this week had us harvesting scallions, carrots, salad mix (red and green lettuce, baby spinach and mizuna), salad turnips, and kale for sale. We also have head lettuce, radishes, arugula, other baby salad leaves (mustard, kale, and chinese cabbage) large spinach leaves and Swiss chard growing that we didn't harvest this week. After seeing what growers in Oregon were doing last winter, we planted some fava beans in the tunnel late last fall and are hoping they make it through. There are only about 100 square feet so it won't be a big yield. They have a little cold damage on the leaf tips but are still really green. We tried the same with a single row of shell peas (for us to eat!) that are about 4 inches tall and haven't turned brown and died yet. We would have made more money filling that space with something we could harvest this winter and plant peas and favas in February, but it's still been something fun and new.

We've been taking seed inventory over the past week to see what needs to be ordered. We are planning to finish harvesting some of the carrot, radish, turnip, and arugula beds in the next week or so and start replanting February 1. We talked with a nearby grower last night at a farmers' market meeting who is growing transplants for us this year. The tomato and pepper seeds came in the mail yesterday and he is getting ready to seed them in about three weeks. We're scheduling to put 8 week tomatoes and peppers in the tunnel on April 15th. Thinking of sunshine, warmer temps and longer days! Hope everyone else is doing the same.