



University of Vermont

Extension

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

## Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – January 3, 2026

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<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

### REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Marlboro) Another interesting year. Raspberries and black raspberries were better than average once we realized that black raspberries need to be netted to keep the birds out. Blueberries were good to above average with no sign of SWD.

Veggies were all over the map but were better than expected given the drought. Lots of really good cabbage. The little Pinto potatoes did better than other varieties. We appreciate all who visit our farmstand and support local producers, and many thanks to our family and neighbors who help out!

(W. Rutland) Had a great spinach crop this year. Tomatoes were great, too. My experimental round bale-leaf composting was super.

Irrigating 2.5 acres with a 275-gallon tote mounted on a converted hay wagon sucked, cause it's all I did for 2 months, resulting in a 3/4 of a garlic harvest, 1/4 of a winter squash harvest and stunted Brussels sprout crop. Three springs went dry. Hay crop was poor but that's farming.

Exceptional experience was buying an almost new sicklebar mower, for managing my multiyear cover crop plantings. Mowing with it instead of bush hogging cut the time in half with a lot less wear and tear on the tractor.

(West Haven) On our little farm, the squash family enjoyed the dry hot weather. Customers enjoyed the cantaloupe and watermelons, and the winter squash was also very sweet. We found a new cantaloupe variety that held up to disease pressure much better than an old favorite that appeared to lose resistance.

The biggest problem was sales. The food banks we sold a lot of produce to in 2024 had little to no funds to purchase from us in 2025.

(Bowdoinham ME) At Stonecipher Farm it was a good year. It may have been one of the driest in our 17 seasons, however, it is our 5th season with unlimited water from a river (quite the infrastructure job), so dry weather means we can water exactly what the plants need. It is a lot of labor to run all the irrigation.

I ruined our ginger first thing this spring, with a tarping experiment! That was painful. But after buying and planting more seed, we ended up with one of our best yields.

The deer were completely out of control, the whole year. They ate the centers out of radicchio, tops off late fall carrots, and the carrot seedlings, so we lost density! We sprayed with soap all summer just to keep seedlings from getting mown. And they never let up.

By the time fall carrots and beets were maturing we had to row cover everything to keep them out! And they tore the cover! In the end, we lost 80% of our carrots, and the deer turned to the beets, so we had to harvest them early. A full perimeter fence is in order and will cost a ton of money. I wish there was a grant for this. Especially since the State owns the damn deer.

High tunnels did great. I scaled back some relay crops that are harvested in spring. While we do get incredible yields per bed, the impact on summer crops, which are the real money makers, has felt too high. For instance, rather than 4 rows of onions, where we would plant eggplant into the onion beds, slightly before onions are harvestable, now we have only 2 rows onions, with the outside rows planted to spinach, which we will replace with eggplants late April. We are no-till, so we do a lot of this relay stuff. We upped tomato numbers, but at a toll on the crew for pruning and trellising, so I will scale that back, and do more peppers. We never have enough bunched carrots in spring and early summer, so I will be doubling those, and cutting back on greens, which everyone is flush with all at once.

We lost our foreman here, to an untimely death, so we have a lot to contend with. The toll will be heaviest on me. I will try to work hard to set up better SOP's and digital info sharing with the crew.

(Plainfield NH) 2025 was a mixed bag for us. We still have gobs of carrots, potatoes and onions to sell this winter, and that is a good thing. We got some lucky breaks during the drought. When no one else seemed to get a random storm, we picked up two, which were crop savers.

The cold rainy weather in April, May and early June made it difficult for some crops. We had the worst strawberry crop ever. Best blueberry crop ever. We are not able to fallow/cover crop old ground for a long enough period of time and we are seeing disease pressure in the strawberries. Doing our best to cover crop and rotate, but there are problems with continually cropped lands.

A December house fire puts a nasty crimp in daily activities and that will continue until reparations are complete. We had a great crew and the challenge will be to convince them they want to be here in 2026.

Going into 2026, demand for our products seems strong, though we would like to see more for the ornamentals, as increased cost of inputs in that area seems more than for the outdoor crops. We will continue to struggle with getting enough labor. Will the federal government change its mind regarding offshore contract labor? Will USDA reimbursements come or not? How are we going to respond to the continued challenge of climate change? How to price products and be sensitive to consumers?

We have virtually the whole farm on drip irrigation now, but applications will continue to be fine-tuned. We will continue to treat cover crops and living mulches with as much stewardship as a high value solanaceous crop. We will continue to factor in failures when enterprise planning, given the realities of farming. We will continue to be vigilant to prevent animal intervention and crop loss. All while we try to convince employees that it is important to keep the tanks fueled up and the harrows greased. Plenty of challenges new and old, and surely some over the horizon that we just don't know about yet.

(Little Compton RI) We are letting 38-year-old high tunnels/heated greenhouses get rest from constant summer tomatoes/winter greens/winter veggies. It has been an incredible run, but soil tests indicate we have pushed the envelope too far. So, in 2024 we built two more houses, 32x188 and 32x96, not to increase production but to let some other houses take two years off for soil resuscitation! With plastic removed and heaters and electronics wrapped up or removed we will put down a series of cover crops, compost teas and other biologicals to bring back the soul to our soils. We plan to buy a hand-held meter that can measure soil biological activity and sends reports to your Iphone. Check out [microbiometer.com](http://microbiometer.com)

One of our old greenhouses is still packed with broccoli and Chinese broccoli, about ready to harvest in late January. No heat, but daily row cover maintenance, and no fertility except leftover nutrients from summer tomatoes.

Winter markets are doing well. Having fresh greens, and well-timed stored produce differentiates us at the market. A stand-out has been Italian sprouting Cauliflower JSS Song TJS-65. Almost too big a harvestable head but we get bang for the buck by easily breaking them up into small florets and selling in loose bags. Amazing storage life; like 45 days with no brown spots! Another stand-out is lighter/whiter radicchios. We had to get the timing and fertility down. We market a blend of varieties, also in bags.

## **FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR VERMONT FARMS**

Thinking about grants for upcoming projects on the farm? Please reach out if you want to talk through ideas or need someone to review a grant proposal. Julie Callahan- help with any type of funding for your farm- [Julie.Callahan@uvm.edu](mailto:Julie.Callahan@uvm.edu); Rachel Stievater- help understanding and accessing NRCS programs- [Rachel.Stievater@uvm.edu](mailto:Rachel.Stievater@uvm.edu).

For a full list of funding opportunities visit: <https://go.uvm.edu/vegfundinglist>

### **Current opportunities for all farms:**

NRCS is accepting applications for programs through January 15, 2026!

If you did not get in your [Conservation Program application](#) for [EQIP](#) or [CSP](#) by the state deadline (August 22, 2025 in Vermont), get in touch with your local USDA office.

<https://www.farmers.gov/working-with-us/service-center-locator>

The Fruit Guys Community Fund-Due January 30

<https://fruitguyscommunityfund.org/>

USDA Rural Development- Value Added Producer Grant -Opens January 15

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/business-programs/value-added-producer-grants>

### **Current opportunities only for Vermont farms:**

NOFA VT Farmer Resilience Grants- Due January 26

<https://www.nofavt.org/services-resources/farmers/funding-opportunities/farmer-resilience-grants>

Vermont Family Farmer of the Month Award- Due January 20

<https://www.vermontfamilyfarmeraward.org/>

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board Water Quality Grant- Due January 14

<https://vhcb.org/farm-forest-viability/viability-grants/>

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **VVBGA ANNUAL MEETING**

Tuesday January 20. Lake Morey Resort, Fairlee, Vermont

**Deadline to preregister for \$65 per person is January 12.** Fee includes food. At-the-door, add \$20.

Check out the program with a dozen varied presentations, and the trade show with 38 exhibitors.

Renew or join the VVBGA and purchase meeting tickets at <https://vvbga.org/>

### **NOFA WINTER CONFERENCE**

February 14-15, St. Michael's College, Burlington VT

## NO-TILL AND COVER CROP CONFERENCE

February 19, DoubleTree Hotel, Burlington VT. This year's event features a vegetable farm track!

## STATEWIDE MEETINGS TO LEARN ABOUT FSA AND NRCS PROGRAMS

Mark your calendar for the in-person event nearest you in March or early April. These sessions will help farmers learn about **Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service programs**. Come hear from a farmer and their NRCS Conservation Planner, FSA staff, and get support on-the-spot in filling out necessary paperwork to be eligible for funding. Registration details are coming soon.

Questions in the meantime? [Rachel.Stievater@uvm.edu](mailto:Rachel.Stievater@uvm.edu)

- Thursday March 5 – Brattleboro
- Tuesday March 17 – Middlebury
- Tuesday March 24 – St. Johnsbury
- Thursday April 2 – Williston
- Tuesday April 7 – St. Albans
- Thursday April 9 - Morrisville