



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News –January 30, 2019
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www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry

RENEW YOUR VVBGA MEMBERSHIP NOW

Cost is \$45 per farm, per calendar year; \$55 after January 31. You'd don't have to be located in Vermont. Membership gets you on our awesome grower listserv.

<https://vvbga2019.eventbrite.com>

CAPS (produce safety accreditation) program sign-up for 2019 can also be done on this site. Cost is \$10 per farm, scholarships are available. And, you can make a gift in support of applied research for vegetable and berry growers. Thank you to the 39 people who have donated to the VVBGA research fund so far! Gifts range from \$10 to \$500. Every bit helps.

PRESENTATIONS FROM VVBGA MEETINGS ARE POSTED

Slides from the Annual Meeting are at:

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/VVBGAMeeting2019Presentations.html>

Slides from the Mulching and Tarping Conference are at:

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/VVBGAMulchTarp2019Presentations.html>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Brookfield) Vole pressure is high. Kale and spinach are going strong without heat. Growth is slow but there. Marketing CSA for spring and year round. Testing compost and high tunnels soon. Ready for spring.

(Charlotte) We are halfway done pruning the blueberries. We have some nice growth for this year's berries! We are thinking what we want to plant for this year, and if we want to rent some of the land or start planting veggies. We are trying to figure out how we can extend our season.

(Burlington) As is usually the case, I was impressed by the excellent 2-day conference of the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association last week. So much good work to contemplate and adopt! Thank you Vern, Virginia, and the team of presenters for a great couple of days!

I was really interested in the deep dive on using silage tarps. I got great tips such as tarping bare soil areas, after late harvest, for winter, to preserve soluble N for an early spring crop, and using a mulch winder with replaceable spools to wind-up inter-row weed mat for easy future use.

I'm still amazed by how many staples growers use to secure their weed mat, which we've always found very time consuming. We only use a limited amount of weed mat because I hate the time required for staples. And don't like the bags either for materials handling and obstacles, so have shied away from both methods, but maybe it is worth it after all.

Can't wait for more research reports to help dial in whether the weeds under tarps are dying from cooked seeds, rotting/biological decomposition of seeds, or germinating and smothering seeds. With that information tarps deployment could be very strategic and consistently effective.

Based on the early results of the high tunnel nutrient management research, we are tightening up our tunnel tomato spacing for more yield, and (we hope) somewhat less pruning. Doing the same with our tunnel cucumbers so that we can quit field cukes entirely. We've really like the Beit Alpha type 'Katrina' in the tunnels the past two seasons.

(Rochester) We are excited to be purchasing an Easy Harvester this year, with assistance from a friend of the farm. <http://www.driesvenplant.nl/en/easy-harvester>. It should help us bring in more blueberries during peak season, and we are hopeful it will help us catch mummy berry as well.

(Northfield) The change in day length has already begun to show its effects in overwintered high tunnel crops. Crowns of Salanova, spinach, mizunas, etc. are all showing tiny bits of growth and good color. Spinach downy mildew presence has been low key, phew. Seems worth the effort to uncover Remy any chance we get (whenever ambient temps above row cover get above 30F), and assist high tunnels in shedding snow on beautiful sunny or even bright cloudy days to capture what solar gain we can get (bah, who needs Crossfit?) Drip tape headers haven't unfrozen enough in weeks to run water, hopefully plant roots are deep enough to access what they need but seems sufficient to walk around to dry spots with watering can in mean time.

Proud to say that we've been able to harvest nearly every week of the winter so far, really just beginning to have a leaner offering. Spinach is aplenty, while salad greens and braising greens have been harvested down to nubbins. Glad to have blanched frozen vacuum packed greens to help get us by the dead of winter. Our decision to stockpile in late fall/early winter and hold our customers back on volumes means that they get fresh stuff this late when most farms run low.

(Argyle NY) Another month of consistent cloudy weather. Moderate temperatures with the exception of one night has helped greens growth this past month. Heaters used that one night in our three tunnels helped us skate through with no damage. We are cutting regrowth on our lettuce that was last cut in late November. Salad mix production has been good even though we started almost 6 weeks early.

Spinach is another story, with lackluster production even though we planted it on time. We have 20 varieties and only a handful have been picked twice. Kale, chard, and Asian greens are doing great, but waiting for February sun to pick up production. Root crops are holding up well, russets are selling out fast. Interesting things this winter we saw was a climate battery, and hearing someone put two rows of pex on a high tunnel bed, hooked them up to a water heater and feel it works to keep temps up on cold nights under the row-covers. Always experimenting.

(Cape Elizabeth ME) The cool, cloudy fall delayed our late-fall planted winter greens like kale, but by December they bounced out of it and we've had increased harvests from our unheated tunnels. Customers count on our farm for winter greens, with neighboring farms rotating out of greens this winter. We have unmet demand at market until grow-back kicks into overdrive in March. Just finishing up choi and salanova. Rainbow chard and kale are upright and amazing compared to last year's slump after the extreme lows in mid-December 2017.

We take a laid-back approach to covering and uncovering crops as we have young kids and want more family time in winter. Tunnels are uncovered until the end of the year, then we cover with Ag-19 and then Ag-34 as the coldest weather sets in. We have not found our lax uncovering on sunny days to be an issue after mid-December. We do move covers, just not daily.

This week we start petunias and pansies (and lettuce mix for Feb. transplant) under lights for blooms in May at our annual plant sale. We're late compared to larger nurseries who start their pansies after Xmas. I was impressed by the customer demand for any plant with a bloom from our organic nursery, so we also will seed dahlias, marigolds, bedding type zinnias and others in early Feb. for half gallon and pint-pot sales, since those were most popular, along with the tomato, basil and herb seedlings. Happy to find deep Jumbo 804 packs from Nolt's to be competitive with the 4 pack markets, since so much has switched away from 6 packs.

We are building a germination chamber, hacking Small Farm University's great info. Also building a shelf outfitted with heat mats and full spectrum grow lights for the fussy seeds like flowering perennials. One gal. organic flowering perennials were not popular at farmers' market, but at our farmstand gardeners bought up showy pollinator plants, especially Echinacea and hummingbird plants. Mixed annual flowering 12" containers were also a quick sell once the price was lowered to \$20/pot in June. Gotta start a following, maybe in future I can raise the price.

Hiring was a breeze, finally. Our starting wage is \$12 with a summer bonus and small paid vacation, and annual raises based on performance. Celebrating 10 years this season has us honing in on what sets our farm apart. Our job description explains what makes the experience of working here unique, and it might have helped in hiring, but really, I think we got lucky.

We have started paying the crew to read our entire handbook in a farmer-led training, as well as a separate handout on work ethic and professionalism. For the plant sale and nursery operation we have a separate handout describing those enterprises, their calendar, and what is expected of the greenhouse leader. We see each leader of our farm work areas (Wash/Pack, Transplanting,

Wednesday Market, Greenhouse Seeding/Plant Sales) as necessary to the whole farm. We don't hire separately for them with separate job descriptions but divvy them up after we get to know the crew's personalities, interests and skills. Maybe it would be easier if we did separate the job descriptions instead of having one general description, but we have found the way we are doing it promotes teamwork and builds trust, and pride in being asked to be in charge of an area.

We are planning to re-do our wash/pack area and sign up for CAPS-Plus (the food safety accreditation accepted by Hannaford in place of GAPS) put on by VT Extension but available to farmers in other states if they are members of the VVBGA).

AG ENGINEERING TECH TIPS

(Andy Chamberlin, UVM Extension)

Check out these new post-harvest information resources.

Last Resort Farm (Dairy barn renovation for ~\$60k): Interview with the owner, video showing the details of his instrumented coolers. See: go.uvm.edu/lrf

Mighty Food Farm (New packshed construction and CSA room for ~\$100k) Updated videos from the project, with an interview with the owner and video of the pack shed in action washing fresh vegetables. See: go.uvm.edu/mighty

Footprint Farm (New construction, with living space for ~\$300k) Case study showcasing post-harvest decisions and how they built their new packshed/home. Video shows washing in action and an interview with the owners. See: go.uvm.edu/footprint

Vegetable Wash Sinks, Tanks, Tubs and Basins: Upgrades for Efficiency and Ergonomics See: go.uvm.edu/sinks

Cooler Construction, Walls and Panels: Guidance on different construction practices and things to know for building or installing a walk-in cooler. See: go.uvm.edu/coolerwalls

WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU NEED TO ADAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

Researchers at the University of Vermont want to interview vegetable/berry producers in VT and ME to about their climate change perceptions and adaptation needs. How are you thinking about climate change on your farm? What do you need to respond to climate change? What resources are most useful for your potential challenges or opportunities from climate change? Interviews are one hour or less, with cash compensation of \$50. They will be audio-recorded for research purposes, but interviewees will remain anonymous. If interested, contact project director Meredith Niles, Assistant Professor, University of Vermont at 802-656-4337 or mtniles@uvm.edu. Additional information can be found at https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/64f510_4a80da34bc064dd2a057779dae671ffd.pdf

SURVEY OF DIRECT MARKETERS IN VERMONT

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFAM) is partnering with the NOFA-VT to collect information about direct market farmers in Vermont who sell their products through CSAs, farmers' markets, and farmstands. Some of this information will be used to update statewide directories of farm stands and CSAs, including those maintained by VAAFAM, NOFA-VT, and DigInVT. The information that will be listed publicly is clearly noted in the survey. In addition, we are collecting information on the needs of direct market farmers. Individual answers provided in response to sales and economic data will not be shared publicly, only in aggregate form in reports and publications. Details from the "Farm Information" section may be shared with other organizational listings to promote your farm stand and/or CSA only if you choose the option to have your farm information listed. Please take the survey at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2018producersurvey>

GET YOUR NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN DONE THIS WINTER!

Don't miss these day-long nutrient management workshops where you can develop or complete a RAPS-compliant NMP. Learn to use VVBGA's on-line farmOS record keeping system; Hear from other farmers about their soil health strategies; Learn from a featured soil health speaker about how on-farm practices affect nutrient availability.

Feb. 1, Poultney* (changed from Jan. 30, due to storm)

Feb. 11, Burlington*

Feb. 13, Springfield*

Feb. 21, Randolph

Feb. 26, Amherst, MA (part 1 of soil health series)

Feb. 28, Brattleboro -- (part 2 of soil health series)

March 2, Craftsbury

*These workshops are "cafe style" and can be attended for any portion of the day--perfect for anyone who has a partially completed plan or would like enhanced one-on-one TA, especially if you attended a workshop last year. For more information on these workshops or assistance with vegetable nutrient management, please contact Rebecca.Maden@uvm.edu

THE YOUNGER GENERATION IN FARM SUCCESSION

Mike Ghia, Land For Good

The farm succession process is often driven by the older generation. But the roles of the younger generation in the process are highly significant. Hearing from the next generation in a structured and deliberate manner often helps the older generation get clarity on options and directions they can pursue. In a family transfer, when adult children have non-farm careers, there may be an assumption that they have no interest in the farm, which is not always the case. There are many examples where young adults go out and explore the world, then come back to the farm.

On the other hand, just because someone grew up on farm does not mean that they are cut out to run a successful farm business. If the priority is to keep the business going, succession can't just be viewed as a birthright. The younger generation needs to show some initiative and aptitude and willingness to learn not just the skills of production, but the skills of management.

In some cases, the best candidate to take over a farm is not a family member, but a trusted employee, or young farmer running their own start-up. For some farms a viable succession scenario is a team of family and non-family with the right mix of skills.

To help the younger generation explore being a successor, and communicate with the older generation, Land For Good developed a Handbook that can be found at:

<http://landforgood.org/wp-content/uploads/LFG-Farm-Succession-And-Transfer-Strategies-For-Junior-Generation-Handbook.pdf>

REAL ORGANIC CERTIFICATION POTLUCKS

These gatherings will explain the Real Organic Project's free certification, done at the time of the VOF inspection for those interested. The first will be at the Intervale Food Hub in Burlington on Jan. 31 at noon. Please park in the lot across from the Intervale office. The second will be at Dave Chapman's home at Long Wind Farm in East Thetford on Monday, Feb. 4 at 5 pm. The third will be a day-long symposium on March 2 at Dartmouth College featuring Eliot Coleman, JB Fortier, John-Paul Courtens, Emily Oakley, Paul Muller, Francis Thicke, and others. Cost will be \$25 (lunch included). More details soon. Please RSVP as to which meeting you will be attending. Thanks, Dave Chapman. davechapman52@gmail.com or 802-299-7737

2019 NOFA-VT WINTER CONFERENCE

February 16-18, UVM Davis Center, Burlington, VT

VVBGA members can register at the NOFA member rate using access code NOFA-VVBGA at www.nofavt.org/conference. Don't miss sessions focused on high tunnel nutrition, tomato grafting, irrigation systems, cover cropping, business planning, hemp production, and more. Monday intensive options include no-till vegetables and branding and marketing. Questions? winterconference@nofavt.org or 802-434-4122.