



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – January 7, 2015
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Benson) It's been pretty easy going so far for winter greens production but that will change with the very cold nights. Stockpiled greens have been holding quality quite well so far with enough inventory to mostly get through to early Feb. Started greenhouse plug tray seedings today with transplanting scheduled for 1st week of Feb. Will start with seed orders next week - seems like there are more catalogs than ever to go through. I am not ready for 2015 to start yet. Oh well.

(Burlington) Winter tunnel production doing well so far, and Winter CSA members are very happy. We'll see how they do coming back to fewer greens after the holiday break. Continuing to like Salanova lettuces, though we are seeing some wide variation in downy mildew susceptibility. We have enough baby lettuce, baby kale, bok choy and arugula out of our tunnels and nice quality kale and chard from the field (up until about now), that we've not begun to dip into our stockpiled spinach. That all changes with this week's deep freeze, as the field kale finally quit and we picked out the tunnel bok choy. Storage crops are keeping well, except our butternut, which is melting sooner than usual; may not make it through mid-March as we often do. It makes such a difference to have clean cabbage going into storage; sure wish we could order a mild, dryish autumn every year.

(Williston) The 16" of heavy wet snow is all but a memory now. It was a challenge getting it to slide off the hoop house due to the rain event that happened in between. I use a push broom to gently tap from inside to encourage it to slide off. It took a bit more persuasion this time though. I later shoveled the snow away from the sides as it was up near the hip boards. I think my first purchase of 2015 will be a snow blower! The Winterbor kale in the hoop house is holding up fine so far and I have been harvesting weekly. This next blast of cold air might bring harvest to a halt for a while. I have 2 layers of Agribon 19 so I will see how it gets thru 10 below which is predicted. Garlic looks happy under a thick layer of mulch and glad to have the extra protection with cold temps and no snow cover. Temps are like a roller coaster again this year so I am hoping the perennial herbs will pull thru this year. Last year I lost many plants due to the extreme temps so will consider mulching if the losses are high again.

I worked with the Farm Viability Program this year and just finished my business plan and did an enterprise analysis on my value added pesto. It was a great process and I learned so much about where my business will be going in the future. This will be a great tool to use moving forward. Sales of pesto were good during the holiday season with my wholesale accounts. I still have plenty more in the freezer to get me thru the next couple of months. It's good to have demos in the stores to keep in touch with customers during the winter months. Seed catalogs are trickling in and winter webinars are keeping me busy for now. Looking forward to the Veg and Berry meeting coming up at the end of the month. Looks like there is something for everyone.

(Shelburne) Winter tunnels are looking good. Minimal covering on the kale, parsley, and cilantro, none on the spinach. I have harvested the kale, parsley and cilantro pretty thoroughly, now letting them be (except to supply my farm store that is open 4 days per week, but no wholesale). Spinach still has a lot of large leaves; we actually got decent regrowth the week of Christmas when it was so warm for 4 days in a row. I will begin seeding lettuce, kale, and peas in a few weeks! It always comes so fast. Then I will expect a lot of regrowth starting mid-Feb and will wait to rip out all the winter crops until April. So far, this is the most productive fall/early winter I have had in my unheated houses.

(Weare NH) Tunnel greens growing slower than last winter but cooler and cloudier weather is most likely the culprit. Trying some scallions and carrots in tunnel. Scallions made their appearance but the carrots are a no show so far. Storage is at the end of the line for squash but cabbage and root crops still plentiful and holding well. Crop plan done. Seed and supply orders start next month.

(Argyle NY) The winter weather is much kinder this year winter and we also made planting, seeding, and transplanting the greens a priority to get them done on time, thus our harvests in the unheated tunnels are yielding about 200 lb. of greens per week, far ahead of a year ago. Spinach has slowed growth but is healthy, despite years with soil diseases, possibly helped by soil drenches of biologicals. We have 18 varieties and most are great. We see very few plants with mites but we are battling chickweed! Salanova lettuce heads from the mid-August seedings are huge and ready for harvest this week for salad mix; successive plantings are doing well and we are keeping 3 to 6 covers on to test the cold tolerance. Will report on that later. Other greens are doing well with good regrowth but the cold this week will challenge that, and we will see how the large kale and chard hold up as well. The temporary 20' wide tunnel over the fall kale worked great and the final crates of it were harvested Sunday. Root crops have been storing well and Brussels sprouts are still green and nice as we stored them in the garage in bins misted daily with water; the light keeps them green. Markets picking up a little but much slower than last year.

(Durham CT) Timing remains everything for winter growing. In past years, we'd plant in the high tunnels after the tomatoes were all out, making sure to have everything planted by the beginning of the Persephone Period that Eliot Coleman talked about way early on. In so doing, we would be out of greens by the end of the calendar year. This year, we planted a substantial amount outside and covered with low tunnels. I love the low tunnels for many reasons, except that there is always an event of too much wind when everything lets loose! Fortunately, that only happened a few times this Fall. Meanwhile, in the high tunnels, most things were planted mid-November in anticipation of having a ton of things for sale for February. Also, by delaying on our high tunnels planting, we were able to keep our late tomato sales and ginger going later than ever. That leaves us with a thoroughly harvested outside and not a great deal to sell inside. Which is OK, because having a little down time works for me. Next year, guess I'll mix it up a little and have more ready for January. All the greens in the high tunnels are robust, almost ready to harvest and extremely hearty. Just started putting row covers on now. Trying to get them to be tough and use to extreme cold. One house has a high vent in both gables, that we keep open all the time. Perhaps counter intuitive, but the moisture level stays real low in that house. Seems to be working. Crops are Gazelle spinach, Red Russian kale, claytonia, High Mowing Yankee Lettuce Mix, red choy, Yaya carrots and mizuna. In the past, I've found mizuna a poor choice for making any inroads into the winter. The patch in the high tunnel this year was harvested once early. I've left it uncovered through all the cold weather we've received so far and it has managed to figure out how to stay lush and happy despite the cold. It seems like a balance, always. If you cover something, it will tend to grow faster, but not be as cold tolerant. One last thing about the Persephone Period: yes, things grow slow, but they don't stop. We planted lettuce, claytonia and carrots all around the beginning of December. They've all germinated and are slowly, but still growing. Other than that, we've got several thousand spinach starts that we'll be planting in about 10 days.

(Little Compton RI) I was thinking since last summer if it was my poor farmer timing or if my Entrust got baked in the mail but I had very lackluster Colorado potato beetle control on my potatoes last summer and the second application for the second flight was even worse than the first. Then I heard a similar story from one of the top organic farmers in Maine who grows seed potatoes so I am thinking we may be running into CPB resistance to spinosad (Entrust active ingredient). If true, potato growers are going to have to make some plans... With the big freeze coming we spent the last ten hours getting everything in the barns or coolers to avoid damage. After many years it is clear to me that my biggest problem with winter tunnel growing is wind. Second is the cold, and a distant third is the weak winter sun. I believe this so completely I am thinking of putting up some cheap Quonset tunnels for just growing Dec- Jan greens and lettuce. What a difference in the plants are that are completely out of the wind's battering influence. Low tunnels and Johnny's style electric conduit or 10 ga wire all give good protection for some crops, over winter onions, etc. but for greens it needs to be a greenhouse or tunnel--at least where we are located.

Winter markets down our way are flat, and that has been with good weekend weather. Everyone at the market is concerned. I think it is just the ebb and flow of consumer interest. Next big thing for us is humidity control and monitoring in our winter storage coolers. Now that I am aware of our lack of control over this I can see the toll it is taking. Right now we are buying cheap beach towels and putting them soaking wet over mountains of root crops; it helps but I can see we need to take the next step.

TEN DAYS LEFT TO PRE-REGISTER FOR VVBGA MEETINGS Jan. 20 and 21

Program info for the Post Harvest Handling Conference and Annual Meeting are here:

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/newsletter/12-16-14.pdf>

Register for the meetings and/or pay membership dues on-line at:

<http://2015vvbga.eventbrite.com>. On-line registration closes at 5 pm, January 17!

Or, you can print the membership form then mail it in with your check:

www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/VV&BGA/VVBGA_membership_form.pdf

PRACTICAL FOOD SAFETY WORKSHOPS FOR GROWERS in February

Wondering what the fuss is about produce safety? Want to be ahead of the curve on having a plan in place? You will leave this workshop with a solid understanding of the science and risks behind produce safety, and a produce safety plan for your farm. Register now, space is limited! Cost is \$18 for first registrant, \$10 for each additional person from same farm. All workshops run from 8:45 am to 3:30 pm. To request a scholarship or disability-related accommodation, please contact Ginger Nickerson at (802) 505-8189 or gnickers@uvm.edu, three weeks before the workshop. Flyer/mail in registration: <http://go.uvm.edu/4etl7>, On-line registration: <http://go.uvm.edu/-b2il>. Pick from one of 5 locations: St Johnsbury, Feb.18: Extension Office, with Mary Skovsted, Joe's Brook Farm. White River Jct., Feb. 19: Yankee Farm Credit, with Pooh Sprague, Edgewater Farm. Swanton, Feb. 20: Workforce Investment Board Training Center, with S'ra DeSantis, Diggers Mirth Farm. Poultney, Feb. 23: Green Mountain College, with Carol Tashie, Radical Roots Farm. Middlebury, Feb. 24: Extension Office, with Jeremy Gildrien, Gildrien Farm

FARM AND FOOD TECH SOCIAL MEET-UP January 15

The first Farm & Food Tech Social Meet-up welcomes anyone interested in furthering local, sustainable food systems with technology innovations to attend its launch event at Generator, Burlington, Vermont's maker space. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/vtfoodtech>.

TECHNICAL TIPS: Preventing Greenhouse / Tunnel Collapse in Winter

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/factsheets/PreventGreenhouseCollapse.html>