

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – October 20, 2009

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

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Montpelier) Well the deer continue to stay out of the fields and the season is ending like it started: below normal temperatures and wet. Transplanting in the greenhouses for winter is finishing up along with a very large EQIP project. Glad to have both done. Hopefully the weather will cooperate a tiny bit the rest of this month in order to put things to bed outdoors. Finished framing permanent beds in the greenhouses and very pleased with the potential added efficiency and increased growing area. Angled a few of the beds similar to the slope of a cold frame. Going to see how the lettuce does in them compared to flat beds. Outside greens hanging in there even with an inch of snow weighing them down the other day! Took a broom and swept the snow off and started harvesting. Late plantings slowed way down with the below normal temps the last 2 weeks. Market runs for 3 more weeks and demand remains steady. Getting a lot of inquiries about winter market so this is very encouraging. Already making the winter planning/to-do list and getting excited for next spring.

(Starksboro) Tough year, but it's not over yet. With all the late crops for storage, and hence late income, but poor performance on some important summer crops like strawberries and tomatoes, which bring in early cash renewal. The cash flow has been frightening for longer than is usual. We're in the final push to get everything in before the ground freezes. Good carrot crop. It's not over till it's over, but this won't be a banner year.

(Rochester) A hard frost on October 11 finally brought our berry farm to a close for the season, although we managed to pick a further batch of fall blackberries the following morning--frozen on the cane--and put them straight into the freezer, stems and all. They will become jelly this winter. We had a good crop of fall raspberries and blackberries, but as usual they ripened very slowly due to lack of heat. The flavor of the raspberries was excellent but the blackberries were not as sweet as usual. In fact, lack of flavor in all the fruit was generally the case this season, presumably due to overcast conditions during much of the summer, so getting nice sweet raspberries in the fall was a pleasant surprise. It was interesting to note that the raspberries that suffered the worst damage in the spring frost, the more mature plants, put out the most fruit in the fall, while the younger, stronger plants that survived the early frost did not produce any fall crop.

This year, the raspberry yield was down by two thirds due to frost kill; the blueberry yield was down 20% mainly due to incomplete pollination. April's warmth caused our most popular variety, Patriot, to blossom before the bees were fully active. Time now get to a little rest. And we are looking forward to next year!

(Granville NY) After a pretty crazy summer the fall at least is half decent; spinach is absolutely incredible and the beet crop was great. Carrots got Alternaria again so yield will be down but the turnips, rutabagas, celariac, and winter radishes look good. Fall cabbage never headed up and have Bejo seed rep coming to take a look at it later this week. Broccoli and cauliflower look good though, although really not coming on strong. Potatoes are storing well so far; had late blight but mowed and sprayed and what we did store looks good. Will make sure to sell out early and disinfect area so we don't overwinter any disease for next year. First seeding of greens in the tunnel is in, more going in next week. New cooler is working out great. We bought a 40 foot insulated shipping container and added refrigeration equipment. Could have gone with a smaller compressor, it almost never turns on and chill-down is a matter of minutes not hours; they insulate those things well. Markets are down this fall; we had a great summer and now sales have visibly slowed from last year.

(S. Royalton) This weather is a fitting end for the worst growing year I've had in 14 seasons at this. As it turns out the gross looks like it might be the same as last year, but we definitely put more hours in to get there. I'm having a lot of trouble drying off onions. Pumpkins had excellent size and numbers, but winter squash had small numbers?

(Wolcott, VT) Almost all of the seed crops are indoors by now, and so far we've had good germination rates on just about everything, which is always the key measure. A couple of the Brassica seed crops need a few more weeks to break dormancy, but the seed looks really fat and pretty, so we're confident they'll make it. The last of the squash and melon crops were still outside with the hard freeze we just had, which makes harvesting them a lot harder, because they turn to mush, but it doesn't usually damage the seed. A couple crops have had surprisingly crummy seed yields and we think it's because they didn't get pollinated well enough during the endless rain we had earlier this summer. The wild bees will fly in the rain, but the rented honeybees are so finicky that way.

(Little Compton RI) We never got late blight in our greenhouse tomatoes but managed to get every other disease variation on the list. We are going to be extra careful cleaning all parts of the house this year with Oxidate or some similar agent. The winter growing for us started a while ago without much cleaning in between the tomatoes and the greens.

I am hoping the dissimilarities of the plants will allow me to grow the spinach and greens I need for the next few months. Which brings us to the question about the long term ramifications of winter growing: What kind of new pathogens and bugs will come to haunt us if we don't allow our houses to shut down and freeze at least once every year? Since we feel that we need one good cleaning and a freeze down every year we only do winter growing until January 15th. Still after all these precautions, we are seeing some problems creeping up. Our number one problem is cyclamen mites which have been all over our spinach transplants for the last few years. The mites are microscopic and live in the center swirl of the new leaves. Their eggs are deposited on the backs of the spinach leaves and look like tiny water bubbles. Very similar to looking at the back of a baby lambsquarter leaf. We still haven't cracked this nut and are learning as much as we can. For more info:

<http://www.hort.uconn.edu/lpm/greenhs/htms/cyclmites.htm>

(Plainfield NH) Farmstand has closed for the season; frost came as we were closing, taking out the remaining corn, tomatoes and raspberries, perhaps our largest draw. We are trying a four week CSA box share this year for the first time. Cover crops well established, and some final fall clean up around the fields taking place along with harvesting root crops, tying up raspberry canes, a bit of detail pruning in the blueberries. I'm concerned about high populations of voles in the blues and raspberries doing damage if we have a long winter with good snow cover. Deer fence will soon go up for the season. Still wholesaling a bit, but that will dry up in late November as we move more indoors to greenhouse work. Hope to see everyone at the New England Vegetable and Fruit Conference in Manchester, and hope we have something to talk about besides war stories of this summer's weather and diseases.

(Westminster West) We just had our first nice sunny warm day in quite a while. Started planting our garlic crop on raised beds with drip tape. This year's rains and the resulting huge crops made me realize that I just need to get more water to my crops! Still have a good supply of winter squashes and pumpkins. Squash selling well but pumpkins not as well. Several tons of huge onions in storage but selling well so not worried. Just picked the last of the fall raspberries from the greenhouse. For the first time we are picked out before we got frosted out. Tomatoes in the greenhouse are done also. It's been so cold that our fall cover crops haven't really done much yet but the earlier planted oats and field peas look amazing. Awaiting delivery of a new greenhouse frame but not looking forward to building it in November; maybe we'll luck out on the weather. Time to analyze records and figure out what went right and where we went wrong and finish next year's plans. Then try to relax and bask in the afterglow of another year.

(Salisbury NH) Still pulling some huge Kennebec potatoes from the field. We weighed one and it was 2.07 lbs! Think it might take several hours to bake. No sign of blight but we had possibly earth worm damage on some ends but overall very good yields. Not much left: Brussels sprouts (still on the small side), kale, carrots, leeks and lettuce. We made a restaurant connection and have sold quite a bit of product but totally caught off guard on how to price things. Wish there was something like the market bulletin that gave a range of prices for wholesale to restaurants. Sunday was cold and blustery and spitting snow. No accumulation. Looking forward to a rest and to figure out how to grow things in an unheated hoop house.

(Grand Isle) We have had 4 hard frosts in a row which is uncharacteristic for this time of year. It's looking like 3 out of 4 late broccoli plantings won't produce at all. On the plus side we have had great leaf lettuce with NO tarnished plant bug problems. Also the spinach has been great. We were lucky enough to avoid late blight on our home fields, and noticed that our cherry tomatoes were not affected by late blight, even surrounded by severely infected Big Beef plants. The deer have decided they want some green beans to go with their lettuce, spinach and beets (good fiber there), but a single strand woven wire electric fence, sometimes not even turned on keeps them out. In two weeks our Jamaicans will go back to their Island and we will miss them. All in all it's been a good year, but to paraphrase Jerry Garcia, what a long strange year it has been.

(Argyle, NY) Overall, it's been a good year for us despite the challenging weather, diseases, blights, etc. The diversity of crops really helped get us through the tough weeks. Spinach is finally back in good production and the Brussels sprouts are wonderful; we used the Italian mesh netting over the brassicas to keep out the cabbage moths which saved us a lot of time and money in spraying Bt. Will special order more for next year (from Dubois Agrinovation). The sweet potatoes in the high tunnel are all out and curing in the garage; Covington had the highest yield and was best-looking when compared with Georgia Jet and Beauregard. We ended up with approximately one ton, which equates to 18,800 lb per acre, but we can improve that next year by planting earlier and just growing Covington. The beets and 2/3 of the potatoes are in the root cellar. Carrots and celeriac next. Some of the cabbage and broccoli are maturing super slow this year, hopefully most will make it; I know we're not the only ones suffering this dilemma. We have rowcover on them to push them. Markets are still quite strong and many folks are excited about the winter markets. We are planting the transplants into the tunnels this week (spinach, swiss chard, kale, Asian Greens, Arugula, mesclun mix, parsley, broccoli raabs, etc.). Hoping for some nice warm weather (been in the high 20's three times so far) and a few more workers. Looking for a winter intern...know anyone?? Hope to see everyone at the New England Fruit & Vegetable Conference in December in Manchester, NH...it's going to be great with 11 farmer-to-farmer sessions!

KINGSBURY FARM LEASE AVAILABLE, WARREN VT

The Vermont Foodbank seeks to lease its Kingsbury Farm in Warren, Vermont, to an experienced farmer, group of farmers, or an organization that can help fulfill the charitable mission of the Foodbank, interact positively with farm visitors and local community members, and successfully develop an important agricultural resource. The individual or group will provide a predetermined amount of produce to the Foodbank annually in exchange for use of several acres for their own commercial revenue generation. Available are eight acres, a barn, packing and storage building, tractor, and farmhouse building. Details of the lease will be negotiated once a qualified candidate is chosen. For background on project and submittal procedures, e-mail David Thurlow at dthurlow@vtfoodbank.org. Deadline is Nov.11, 2009.

GET GREAT BERRY PRESENTATIONS ON YOUR COMPUTER VIA WEBINARS

A webinar is a presentation or workshop that's transmitted over the Web, usually with the ability for discussion. Cornell University is sponsoring a dozen webinars over the next few months with renowned small fruit experts focused on production and pest management. Participation is easy; all you need is a high-speed internet connection and a web browser. If you don't have a home computer, or a high speed connection, call your local extension office or library and see if they can arrange a viewing. All Webinars start at 1:00 pm and speakers will answer questions during and after the live presentation. There is no charge to participate but registration is required in order to get connected. Connections for each webcast are limited, so register now by contacting Laura McDermott, lgm4@cornell.edu or 518-746-2562. For more info: <http://www.fruit.cornell.edu/Berries/webcastindex.htm>. You can view past webinars anytime from the recorded archive: <http://www.fruit.cornell.edu/Berries/webcastarchive.htm>.

Oct. 30, Strawberry Weed Management. Dr. Robin Bellinder, Cornell Univ. "Overview of Weed Control Products for Strawberries" and Dr. Marvin Pritts, Cornell, "Cultural Approaches to Weed Management"

Nov. 4, Blueberry/Cranberry Weed Management. Hilary Sandler, UMass "IPM Techniques for Dodder in Cranberries", and Dr. Eric Hanson, Michigan State Univ. "New Approaches to Blueberry Weed Management"

Nov. 18, Blueberry/Cranberry Disease Management. Dr. Annemiek Schilder, Michigan State Univ., "Understanding and Managing Blueberry Viruses" and Dr. Frank Caruso, UMass "Important Cranberry Diseases in the Northeast"

Dec. 2, Blueberry/Cranberry Production Topics. Dr. Gary Pavlis, Rutgers “Blueberry Site Preparation and Fertility Considerations” and Sonia Schloemann, UMass “Overcoming Blueberry Pollination Challenges”

Dec. 9, Blueberry/Cranberry Insect Management. Dr. Roger Williams, Ohio State, “Japanese Beetle Management” and Robert Childs of UMass “Winter Moth: A New Blueberry Pest”

Jan. 6, 2010 Bramble Production Topics. Dr. Marvin Pritts, Cornell “Growing Brambles in High Tunnels” and Dr. Fumiomi Takeda, USDA Kearneysville WV “Rotating Cross Arm Trellis for Brambles”

Jan. 20, 2010, Bramble Weed Management. Dr. David Handley, UMaine “Cultural Weed Control Options for Brambles” and Dr. Rich Bonanno, UMass “Using Herbicides Effectively in Bramble Plantings”

Feb. 3, 2010, Bramble Diseases. Dr. Pam Fisher, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture “Controlling Root and Crown Diseases in Brambles” and Dr. Kerik Cox, Cornell “Managing Bramble Viruses”

Feb. 17, 2010, Bramble Insects. Dr. Hannah Burrack, Univ. of North Carolina “Controlling Crown and Cane Borers” along with another speaker to be named later.

Archived Programs to date:

Strawberry Production Topics. Dr. Lewis Jett, Univ. of West Virginia “Growing Strawberries in a High Tunnel” and Kathy Demchak, Penn State “Growing Strawberries on Plastic in the Northeast”

Strawberry Insect Pests. Dr. Richard Cowles of the Connecticut Ag Experiment Station discusses Management of Black Vine Weevil in Strawberries and Dr. Greg Loeb of Cornell speaks on Managing Sap Beetle and Tarnished Plant Bug in Strawberries.

Strawberry Disease Topics. Dr. Mike Ellis of Ohio State Univ. discusses Management of Fruit Diseases and Dr. David Gadoury of Cornell presents Strawberry Powdery Mildew Management.