



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – October 3, 2023
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<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Westminster) The lettuce and kale we replanted after harrowing up many acres due to the endless rains of summer are doing pretty well. The first kale plantings looked terrible but they have bounced back, especially green kale. We're harvesting cabbage and collards, which are doing well. We're done with romaine for the year but will be harvesting red and green lettuce for a few more weeks.

Meanwhile we're harvesting fall crops of carrots, beets, parsnips, rutabagas, purple daikon, and watermelon radish. Picking butternut squash, too – the only winter squash that survived the season. There are a lot of small ones, probably due to lack of sunlight. The first parsnips harvested looked good when we put them in storage, but they turned out to have black rot in the middle. Some of our carrots have a fungal disease killing the tops so we'll get those harvested soon before the tops all die; those carrots will be smaller than we'd like.

Market prices for fall crops are pretty good, probably because there's not a big supply out there. Higher prices should make up a little for our smaller crops this year.

(Burlington) After 97% flood coverage and losing most crops in July, fall is looking OK. We were able to get back in a plant a bunch of crops later July and throughout August. The harvest is like June in October: lots of greens, brassicas, and a few root crops. With all of these together with our tunnels, we'll be able to offer a credible winter CSA share, though at a somewhat reduced rate due to the lack of some key root crops and winter squash.

Our catastrophic losses this year underscored how CSA can be a strong farm insurance plan. After refunding our income-subsidized members, we offered our remaining summer CSA members a pro-rated refund, while urging them not to take it to support the long-term health of the farm, keep the farmers employed, etc. Of the 610 or so fully-paying shares we had about 5 request refunds. Between that and a GoFundMe we were able to make up most of the revenue we lost in the summer and winter share, leaving only a hole with our winter wholesale business, 5-10% of our total revenue.

It has me thinking about risk management, and pining for some land out of a floodplain, but also a lot about the CSA risk-reward proposition and how that works long term. Our 2012 sales after Irene was the only year we missed our CSA sales goals since 1996, albeit still hitting 95% of target. We are making the case to our members now for next summer that looking at any consecutive three-year period, even including 2011 or 2023, our CSA members do well in the economic value equation.

In recent years we've been whittling away at the value of our CSA share and giving less discounted food to our members in order to invest more in the farm and the staff. I continue to ponder how much of that discount is important for us to provide our members in order to have the risk proposition be tolerable and continue to appeal to our people even with the lousy years mixed in, our price for crop insurance.

(Orwell) Having a few blissful days without rain allowed us to make some progress on a construction project and install a new walk-in cooler. It's refreshing to rip out diseasy tomatoes and put in greens, although a few houses of tomatoes that we gave up on a few weeks ago had a surprising turn around, so we are pleased to still have a few fruit to offer accounts. Direct-seeded spinach planted 3-4 weeks ago grew quickly, but is already getting devoured by winter cutworm. I found about 5-6 of various colors and sizes on each plant the other day--at 6 cents a caterpillar, my daughter made some money on them. Sprayed dipel last night and will try to stay on schedule with that for a few weeks while other houses get planted out. They seem earlier and more destructive each year since we first found them about 4 years ago.

(Guildhall) Just started harvesting today. October is the earliest I've ever started, but the weather seems right. We're starting with a 20-acre clay-ish field. Try to get it done while it's dry this week. Parts of that field had standing water between the hills most of the year, so there's all lot of clods riding up the harvester. Overall I expect average yields and quality from the 20 acres of clay, and great yields & great quality from the 20 acres of sand left to dig.

Pumpkin crop pretty much failed. Seeded late, pollinated late, and it's a beautiful weed free field of green jack-o-lanterns. Not a big deal, but a good reminder to get them in early.

(Huntington) Pleasant clouds of dust are set adrift by tractors carrying bins, and the puddles and clods of Summer 2023 seem a distant memory. Well, until this weekend at least. I'll take 3 weeks of blue skies during September, that's for sure. To not have even a cursory frost in September is rare for us, as well. Though it looks like we might get our first taste of icy windshields this weekend.

Our fall brassica planting is surprisingly healthy. I'm not sure if it's stochastic variation, nature's penance, or what, but there is very little disease and all the aphids appear to be on 2 or 3 Brussels sprouts stalks. After a few years of paying a lot of attention to our Brussels and receiving suboptimal results, 2 years ago we decided to employ a more hands-off approach: no leaf removal, no topping, no fussing. And they've been better crops both this year and last. Go figure.

After seeing a talk at the NEFVC extolling its benefits, we tried the OMRI fungicide "Oso" for Alternaria prevention on the big fall brassica block, in addition to a few sprays alternating Serenade and Double Nickel, so either a.) something works in that mix or b.) we got lucky.

Galinsoga and crabgrass yields are well above average, after a summer of strong resistance to canopy shading and iron blight. Butternut squash yields turned out to be about average, and the sweet potato crop is looking to be above average at the current halfway stage of harvest. Potato harvest is on hold for a few weeks, but certain later varieties seemed to thrive this summer, with a generally high tuber size with somewhat below average tuber set. So yields are turning out average on those, which I'll certainly take in a year like this.

(Westminster West) Spent some time today at the Orchard Aid concert held at the Retreat Farm in Brattleboro, it was a community effort to help 5 local orchards that lost most if not all their apples in May during the freak freeze. It's so great to see the community come out and support our local growers with encouragement and love!

Fall is moving along here; squash is all harvested, yields are down about 25% compared to last year, but quality is very high with excellent sugar levels and few squash rotting in storage. Sales are strong and prices are higher than last year, so I consider myself lucky. My potato crop however, was not so good with 65-75% loss. The soils were just too wet to cultivate and standing water from the rains for weeks didn't help at all!

Tomatoes are still pumping out of the tunnel. Ginger, a new crop for us, has done well enough to continue growing it next year. Folks really like it at farmers' market. Nice crops of cabbage, leeks, celery, carrots and beets along with strong garlic sales are keeping market sales way up over last year. Wholesale very steady with squash and potatoes leading the charge. Cabbage worms on Napa have been a beast and twice a week spraying was really needed. Getting the garlic field ready for planting next week already!

(Greenfield Center NY) Fields are gradually drying out. Wondering if anyone else has noticed the lack of color in the leaves thus far this fall? Sugar maples and red maple leaves seem to turn brown and drop immediately, no bright colors, no lasting display. Not sure what to attribute it to.

(Little Compton RI) Just went I think I have endured all possible farming challenges, we get a season culminating in a slow water torture of four days of rain, with many crops still out in the fields. The third weekend of rain and cold impacted our farmers' market in the big city. It was the worst Saturday yet and long term looks like rain again this Saturday.

In mid-July our egg layer production dropped precipitously, and five other farms in our area had the same experience! We thought it might be feather mites or some other external factor. Today, I heard of the local egg producer who simply added lighting into her chicken house to give them 14-hour days. In three days production was back up to normal! Were the chickens reacting to Canadian fire smog or just lack of sunlight due to all the rainy weather? Who knows but you can't argue with success.

Leeks are looking great, and no Allium Leaf Miner has been seen in the state of RI. Our first fall raspberries and no spotted wing drosophila either. However, downy mildew is everywhere and on crops like broccoli, which is something I have never seen.

(Argyle NY) The cooler temperatures of fall are welcome but even better is no frost in sight all the way to mid-October. Never had it so easy with no row covers out yet. Irrigation is going full bore with also no rain in sight. Ripping out summer plants for tunnels is under way with later plantings happening more often because of the warming temperatures. Late winter squash planting in spring has us still with green leaves and actively growing plants so no harvest yet which allows us to focus on the tunnels. Same with potatoes and sweet potatoes!

Taking a chance on very late plantings of cukes, pole beans, and summer squash in the tunnels has paid off so far, but of course get in the way of winter plantings. Flea beetles left us in mid-August and have yet to return so caterpillars and cabbage aphids are the pests of the day. Diseases are at a lull right now except for leaf mold in the tunnel tomatoes.

POLLINATOR SUPPORT REPORT

Laura Johnson, UVM Extension Pollinator Support Specialist

Walks in solanaceous field crops like tomatillos, eggplants, and peppers reveal a number of late season blooms that continue to host foraging wild and managed bees. Mostly seeing bumble bees and honeybees, with a few wild bee species remaining active. White Dutch clover and medium red clover, whether on shoulders of beds of cash crops now gone or in walkways, are in bloom and providing nectar and pollen for these bees. White clover is particularly attractive to honeybees and red clover is favored by bumble bees.

Field margin flowers like golden rods, common boneset, and joe-pye-weed are senescing, while late season asters, like the New England aster are in full bloom. In addition to bees found on these wildflowers, a number of wasps, syrphid flies and other flies are found feeding there.

Grant funding supports the UVM Extension pollinator support program. We are preparing a final report to a funder and would appreciate your feedback. Before **October 6th, 2023**, please complete this 5-minute survey with 8 questions, <https://forms.gle/vMG6mmYKAq7LWRwj7>.

In addition, consider taking 15-20 minutes to complete a Pollinator Support Plan for your farm - with images if you wish, <https://vrbga.org/pollinator-support>. You can download this as PDF to share with customers, too. This is a new feature of the VVBGA web site, and it's free thanks to a grant from the Northeast Extension Risk Management Education Center.

SOIL HEALTH WORKSHOP FOR GROWERS

Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2023. 9:30 - 2:30. Whallonsburg Grange, 1610 Route 22, Essex, NY--just 8 min drive from the VT ferry landing. Join us for presentations, discussions, and hands-on demonstrations focusing on soil health concepts and best management practices for vegetable growers. Topics include tarping, maintaining soil health in high tunnels, cover cropping, reduced tillage, compost microbiology, and more. Hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension's Eastern NY Commercial Horticulture Program. Register by Oct. 27 at <https://enych.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=1821>. For more information or to request accommodations, contact Elisabeth Hodgdon at eh528@cornell.edu or 518-650-5323.

HIGH TUNNEL CONFERENCE

Revitalizing Your Tunnel Vision. December 6 & 7, 2023, Fireside Inn and Suites, West Lebanon, NH. Topics for new and experienced growers, including: Local farm tour; Hands-on insect, disease ID; soil fertility; UV effects on plastic; Irrigation management; and Tracking production costs. Stay tuned for registration details!