



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – October 6, 2010

Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension

(802) 257-7967 x303 vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu

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

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(East Montpelier) The warm dry fall has come to an end; plenty of tropical rain and frosts coming soon. Farm is looking good. Trying to figure out how I did it without a tractor for the last few years. Outside fields are replanted and for the most part looking quite good. Cover crops are in and doing well. Greenhouses are almost flipped and replanted for winter salad and spinach. Looking forward to winter and the change of pace. Plenty of changes to consider and planning to do for next year. All in all a good season. As always a few things were a complete flop and a few things were the best yields I have ever had. Hope everyone finishes up well.

(Fair Haven) What a strange year! Our summer vegetables are still kicking out a little produce each week. Fall crops are doing great. We dug all potatoes and onions and have them in storage. Still have some squashes and pumpkins yet to fully ripen. Tomatoes have been giving and giving! We had tomato hornworms on a few plants in Aug. and Sept. that damaged the tops. Fall raspberries are giving continuous and constant yield; we got a few peak days when we had some showers followed by a good cool sunny day. We're getting produce that is not sold made into pickles, relishes and other items for winter market. Our raspberries are going into the freezer for jam and pies; we lose some income now but want to make sure we have enough to sell to keep our winter market going strong. We have three summer markets for a few more weeks then down to one until next June. We will be making wreaths and other holiday decorations 24/7 from Thanksgiving to Christmas. We have been holding steady at the markets all summer. Overall we might be down slightly from the past 2 years but that's mostly because we lost much of our fruit to frost/snow damage, not because of the economy.

(Bath, MI) Nearly all beds in our 34' x 96' hoophouse are planted for the winter and crops are up and growing well. We are happy with the compost that we bought in this fall after we used what we had made. The last plantings of arugula, red mustard, waido, and red Russian kale for baby leaf salad mix will go in this week to finish out the plantings. Spinach is up and growing very well and we are trying Red Cardinal for the first time this year (also great germination and growing well). First plantings of salad mix, scallions, chard, kale, and head lettuce also looking good. Carrot germination was spotty so we need to work on that for the Feb. plantings.

Still harvesting Swiss chard, red and golden beets, radishes, and hakurei turnips out of the field and planning to try quick hoops for the first time in the next few weeks. Also trying to get some late-planted outside spinach up to size for Nov. and Dec. harvests and may cover them this week to see if that helps. Getting ready to plant garlic and make hoophouse repairs by mid-month. Pretty happy overall with our first farmers market season. Looking forward to moving inside the first week of Nov. to try the first winter farmers market in our area.

(Royalton) Finally got the late blight in the tomatoes. We escaped the frost on October 2nd, so our yellow beans are still going, as are the cherry tomatoes in the hoop house. Time to get the last of the winter squash in. Great crop of spaghetti squash this year, and the late planted beets are thriving. The last batch of sweet corn direct planted on June 14th is almost done. Hoop houses planted to winter crops and the head lettuce in 50s is doing well. Can't wait for the frost to do away with the galinsoga.

(Wolcott) All the seed crops are harvested by now except for one or two remaining squashes. Overall it was a really nice growing season for the squashes, melons, and tomatoes – basically all the wet-seeded crops – but pretty crummy for the dry-seeded greens crops. All that unusual heat in June did them in. They all bolted much too early and with too little frame on the plant, so they didn't make as much seed and what they did make didn't get as mature - possibly because there was so little leaf area to feed it. We'll clean them hard and get a little bit of good seed out of them, but the final yields will be way low. We don't have final yields on the tomato seed crops yet, but what we've got in so far looks really promising. We did an experiment of growing fewer plants and starting them earlier, then putting them out under cover for the first three weeks. This seemed to really boost yields, as the plants had reached a good size by the time the heat came on, and they were ripening up fruit nearly a month earlier than usual. With a hotter-than-usual growing season it's hard to separate the method from the season, but we'll definitely grow them this way again.

(Burlington) Flooding sure makes for a discouraging end to an otherwise bright season. Trying to look at it as bonus woodchuck and swede midge control for next season. I guess that last round of winter rye will be very efficient to put down since we can clear out some really big areas all at once.

(Salisbury NH) We've been busy with off farm jobs. Things are winding down in the field. Still lots of beets, Brussels sprouts and leeks but everything else won't make it because of the cold weather. The drought all summer kept our eggplant and pepper yields very poor. We now have lots of small fruit, a little too late. We had a terrible time getting carrots to germinate; finally succeeded but nothing like last year. Our second hoop house is up and we just need to close in the ends. Not sure if we can get much in raised beds going before the really cold weather. Other hoop house has nice germination and growth but plagued with insect holes in bok choy, spinach and radishes. Not sure I want to spray in the hoop house. Should we have used a row cover to protect them?

The regular farm stand is closed except for customers we know well. Otherwise people drive up and ask for warm weather crops (or even limes!). They're so used to 'one stop shopping'. That said, we still don't see most customers stopping for a good percentage of their weekly groceries. We're in an area where people tend to grow their own so we get business if we're earlier than them and then once their gardens peter out, they come back.

(Westminster West) It's like the drought never happened. The pond is overflowing and the spring is full! All our crops are in the barns and we're focusing on marketing and planning for next year. Still have to put up our new tunnel while getting ready to plant 35,000 garlic bulbs. Cover crops are looking great with all the rain; oats and field peas have replaced winter rye here for the most part. Gotta get my soil tests done soon. I drove to Central Pa. last week to buy a bed maker and mulch layer combo. Nice to see the wonderful Amish farms down there, gotta go back and see more someday.

(Argyle, NY) After the drought, we got 6" of rain, but it was over a 24 hour period and did little damage and overall was great. Cover crops are coming up and growing nicely (mostly rye and clover) and we are starting to harvest and store all field crops. Winter squash is in. We started harvesting sweet potatoes today from our 30' x 144' tunnel; we had put surplus slips from the field planting in there on Biotello in double rows. The field ones (variety Covington) are gorgeous with super yields (one bushel every 3 feet) and we'll have numbers to compare to the tunnel sweet potatoes next report. At least something liked the hot weather!

The first seeding of spinach is done in the high tunnel, we are trialing 8 varieties this winter, seeds compliments of High Mowing and Johnny's. We traveled to Maine and toured Johnny's trial fields, so are anxious to try some of their new and exciting greens that were seen. Nice to have insects mostly gone and few diseases. Septoria and Alternaria will get some research over the winter for possible controls for 2011 as they were prevalent on certain crops late in the season. Finished up sweet corn and now are harvesting leeks. Lots of other fall crops coming on, but the tomatoes are still going strong. Starting into the Conference mode soon, and we love the shorter days!

(Little Compton RI) Winter market greens going in on schedule. I have a date with the Johnny's hoop bender this week. Still putting fields to bed and putting down cover crops. Speaking of cover crops, we picked up two dead chest freezers at the town dump and use them for storing our cover crop seeds. They worked great! No mice and no weevil moths and every seed is dry and happy. Fall broccoli coming in finally after the drought of 2010 ended with a bang. Still a lot of residual bug problems we have never encountered before. For one, black aphids all over just the romanesco cauliflower; not a flea beetle to be seen but still they attack Yukina Savoy and Red Turnips.

We were hurt bad by not creating some storage refrigeration for our onions. Got to build a Coolbot onion storage unit for next year. Same goes for our potatoes. If we are going to be serious about winter growing we have to make the investment in a storage facility to make sure our produce gets to the consumer in good shape in February or we will lose our edge and the localvores will go back to their old supermarket habits.

HARVESTING PRODUCE AFTER FLOODING

From Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Water Quality Criteria for Good Agricultural Practices: You can't test flood water ahead of time like you do with your regular water sources or prevent a flood from happening. The best way to protect your crops against contaminated water during a flooding event is to plant low risk crops in the fields most likely to flood. Low risk crops means plants such as root crops, corn, squash, beans and other hard-sided produce that are washed, peeled or cooked before eating. Plants that are immature at the time of flooding and have time to grow before harvest are also acceptable. The Vermont Department of Health advisory for crops that come in contact with flood water is to discard above-ground fruits and vegetables that have matured and cannot be washed and cooked prior to consumption. High risk crops are leafy, high surface area plants such as lettuce, spinach, cabbage, berries, asparagus and herbs. Crops like these are difficult to clean and remove all contamination with just plain rinsing and should not be eaten after they are exposed to a flood.

From Food and Drug Administration, Guide to Minimizing Microbial Food Safety Hazards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables: Fresh fruits and vegetables that have been partially or completely submerged in flood water, or that might have come in contact with contaminated water, are not safe to consume. There is a high health risk of developing disease from consuming these products. Flood water may be contaminated with sewage, animal waste, heavy metals, pathogenic microorganisms, etc. These contaminants are not only on the surface of the fruits and vegetables, but may move into plant tissues. The FDA considers these products “adulterated” and not fit for consumption. Pooled or standing water after a rainfall that is not likely to be contaminated should not be considered flooding. If your produce is in close proximity to a flooded area but has not come in contact with flood water, prevent cross contamination by keeping harvesting or cleaning equipment and personnel away from the flooded area during growth and harvest.

UPCOMING EVENTS See <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/meetings/meetlist.html>

Oct. 6, 4-6 pm. (rescheduled) We will walk the cover crop trials with 20 plots at Brattleboro UVM Extension office field, where the trial has been split to add wood chips to half of all plots for 2 years.

Oct. 20, 3-5:30 pm. Johnny's Selected Seeds Twilight Walk, Albion ME, featuring: new quick hoops trial, root crops, fall ornamentals, onions, winter squash, Irish and sweet potatoes, leeks. Directions: 877-564-6697 or see www.johnnyseeds.com.

Nov. 3-4. Northeast Greenhouse Conference, Worcester MA. <http://www.negreenhouse.org/>

Nov 8. GAPS workshop for growers. Colchester VT.

Dec. 10. GAPS workshop for growers. White River Jct. VT