

**Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – Oct. 8, 2008**  
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**REPORTS FROM THE FIELD**

This is the last round of reports for this growing season – thanks to all contributors! If you are a ‘winter grower’ interested in sending occasional field reports during the coming months please let me know.

(S. Royalton) Demand was very high this year, but my numbers are flat because the weather caused a lack of product. It was the most challenging year in the 13 I've been at this. The up side is that even in a rough year I did pretty well. Since I've weathered the worst, next year can only be better.

(Rochester) Our Illini blackberries produced well this year for the first time. Plenty of rainfall helped, but a shortage of sunshine has slowed the ripening down. Thus they have matured late and slow, and are now playing chicken with the threat of fall frost, successfully so far. The whole acre of blackberries has produced only 200 lbs. of fruit to date but much more is there to ripen if only the days remain somewhat warm and a hard frost does not take them out. Our Jersey blueberries still have good fruit on the branches and weekend you-pickers and coming in with nice results. With temperatures in the mid-20's called for next week, we will probably be closing for the season after that.

(Salisbury NH) Can we have anymore rain? We're still trying to get our potatoes harvested. No frost yet anyway. Beets have gotten huge. The squash bugs finally won the battle so we pulled up all the plants. Brussel sprouts seem slow this year. Late cabbage are beautiful. Leeks are nice size too. Nasty, rutabagas were a rotten, slimy mess. Got our 10-wheeler load of composted manure and another load of composted leaf material so we're ahead for next year. Overall, it was a great year for sales. If we could grow more, we could sell more. Wishing everyone a safe and short garden clean up season and a restful few months before we start gain.

(Craftsbury) Season is wrapping up well, lots of roots to be dug still. Always wonder where the energy will come from this time of year but there is something about the absolute deadline of winter that is a great motivator. We once again saw big increase in sales this season and are appreciative of the great eaters of Vermont. Going to spend the winter not on construction for the first time in 3 years; instead we'll focus on small improvements that make all the difference, and planning for a great cropping season next year.

(Marshfield) Two notable surprises for this season: 1) UVM testing lab really turned my PSNT test around fast -- I mean results within 48 hours by mail. Even if the summer rain washed away the nitrogen that the test results showed were there, it was interesting to see that I did not need to sidedress at the time of test taking. I recommend checking this out.

2) I used a 50/50 blend of biodiesel and diesel in my Kubota tractor and it was a big mistake, resulting in the tractor being out of commission for a week, a new fuel pump and a hefty tab. I know others have had both positive and negative experiences with biodiesel, so I'm sharing this for what it's worth to others. Even though my fuel tank seemed clean to the naked eye, the biodiesel pulled crap out of it to the point that it ruined one injector and the fuel pump (even though I diligently changed my dirty fuel filters 4 times). Beware.

(Starksboro) It's been a very abnormal year. I've had significant crop losses, but I am also seeing little resistance to sharply higher prices. Will it all even out? I don't know. I have much more planned for storage this year, and most of those crops look OK. We have a winter Farmers' Market planned for Burlington this year, and I hear Middlebury and even Hinesburg have winter markets planned as well. I'll be trying some winter greens in an unheated tunnel. We'll see how that all works out. It's exciting, but what happened to my winter?

(Westminster West) Strange days indeed. Placing orders for next year's seeds and supplies while listening to a stock market melt-down. Amazing that we as farmers must stay optimistic in the face of chaos, or we also sow the seeds of our own demise. It's easy to be optimistic for now, our barn is full with this year's harvest, onions piled high. Winter squash stacked in bins and boxes. Happy customers awaiting deliveries. Cover crops greening up and covering all our fields except the patch awaiting garlic planting for next year's crop. So we plan our work and work our plan and reap what we sow, thus continuing the long march of farmers from long ago. Here's wishing all of you and yours a healthy harvest and a good rest!

(Shaftsbury) Late season highlights include: great crop of sweet potatoes grown with IRT plastic, enough sunflowers for about 800 gallons biofuel, 700 lbs of black beans for our first winter CSA... I guess you could call that a biofuel as well, and celeriac the size of bowling balls. Too much alternaria on our cauliflowers. Cover crops looking good too. Time for lots of fall projects.

(Grand Isle) We are enjoying the temperate nature of fields next to Lake Champlain but may see our killing frost any day. We are hoping it is light so that it gets the top leaves of the eggplant and keeps the fruit safe. Eggplant matured late for us this year. The rest of the farm is pretty well harvested and it's nice to have the winter squash in bins. Butternut, acorn and delicata did fabulously but spaghetti and buttercup had a poor yield for us. We grew 4 varieties of butternut and one variety sized up to average 8 lb each. Incredible. We think it was Avalon but the printing on our marker sticks in the field faded with all the summer rain. Today we brought in the final load of pumpkins. We hope to find homes for them by Halloween; otherwise they become cousins of the Dec. 26<sup>th</sup> Christmas trees. Snow geese are flying overhead. It's a nice time of year to be outside, but I am thinking of buying everyone orange vests because hunter's guns sound too close sometimes.

(S. Royalton) Just got in from covering up crops out in the field looks like we're going to get our first real frost of the fall. We were able to keep weeds under relative control and

get cover crops in at a reasonable time for a change. The fall storage crops are looking good the warm weather thru September was a big help. The crops overall turned out average or better despite some of the weather extremes and insect and disease pressure wasn't above average, must be all the years of building soil fertility are starting to payoff. Will be trying out some season extension in unheated greenhouses with various greens and comparing over wintering to early transplants in spring.

(Durham CT) Such an amazing tomato year for us. The sungolds are still producing in the hoopouses. Late plantings have paid off, as everyone else at the farm markets have stopped bringing tomatoes. The quality remains good, but not August good. Trying to beat the clock with winter greens, both outside and in the hoopouses. Outside, we will construct low tunnels supported by hoops 14 inches off the ground and covered with plastic that is held down by plastic bags filled with compost. Hoping to have enough greens for the new winter markets that are happening in various parts of the state. 'Space' spinach, kale, and claytonia are the most rugged winter warriors that we know about. Also, trying Black Summer bok choy. Timing of the planting is critical, these first few days of October are the last real chances to have greens get to marketable size before winter sets in. Otherwise, the greens will sit patiently all winter and wait for the return of more light to grow again. Actually we believe that they still grow in the winter, only very slowly. Other growers who read this newsletter should let Vern help us find each other, so that we can swap ideas and experiences growing year-round.

(Plainfield NH) As I write this we are frost free, and still picking tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, peppers and Hail Mary sweet corn (a 7/19 planting of Providence and Seneca Dancer) that I told everybody back on Labor Day would never make it before frost. The warm damp weather last week signaled the death of the fall raspberries. Botrytis came in and never left. Cover crops are up and looking well. A few thoughts about the past year: Sales were up and down with both bedding plants and produce. Reasons could have been weather-related, but the faltering economy could have played a role. It was certainly a tricky growing year. Extremes in moisture at different times, with many violent summer thunderstorms, as we saw in 2007. This led to more foliar and soft rot disease. Strawberries and both summer and fall raspberries took a big hit from Botrytis. Saw some new issues with root diseases relating to moisture (Phytophthora). Insects issues were present on all fronts, with their arrival earlier than normal (perhaps as a result of the ground not deeply freezing before we got snowcover last winter?). Deer, cedar waxwings and redwing black birds and other vertebrate pests probably caused more economic damage than insects. We had a great work crew that marshaled on for long hours and under less than inspiring conditions. Good rain gear, a good laugh, a positive attitude and an occasional night 'off the farm' with the troops are excellent management tools. Customers ask me if it was a normal year. If anybody can define what makes a normal year in this business I would love to hear it. See you at the winter meetings.

(Woodbury) What a wild ride. All the sun we got late saved our season and a lot of our fall crops. Good looking onions, potatoes, some winter squash. Still cutting beautiful lettuce and I am finally back in carrots again. Row cover has been doing a good job of hiding things from the deer, and they haven't done as much damage as in years past. I am

excited about the prospect of wrapping this one and looking towards the next season. Sales continue to be strong at our markets, and our CSA went well. May be adding some shares next year. The thought of having to do another market leaves me a little pale, but I could grow the CSA fairly easily.

(Cambridge) I was able to take advantage of the nice Sept. dry spell and get my crops tilled under and a cover crop on just about everywhere. Only garlic, tomatoes, peppers, Brussels, leeks, fennel and celeriac left to sell. Thank goodness. There's a reason why I don't farm in California. Unfortunate news to end the season, though: I have corky root in my tomato house. I'm told by UVM Extension that it is extremely rare. Lucky me. It doesn't kill the plants but saps them of energy pretty badly, curtailing production. Don't know where it came from but will take Herculean efforts or a three year fallow to get rid of. Aside from that, it was my best year yet. A nice, restful winter to all.

(Argyle NY) This season has been up and down with weather, but overall a great growing season with irrigation. We are in a rain shadow, so didn't get most of the huge downfalls of rain like many others near us. Still no frost here, so we're still harvesting many summer crops like beans, zucchini, sweet corn and tomatoes, and just started harvesting broccoli, leeks, celery, and winter squash; soon we'll harvest turnips, kale, Brussels sprouts, radishes, kohlrabi, cauliflower, etc. Onion crop was wonderful this season, which was grown on the Biotello black plastic/corn starch mulch (straw in between rows), along with many other crops. We keep trying to find ways to be more efficient with less labor; that was a great system for us. High tunnel production was great for tomatoes, cukes, zucchini, and herbs; we are now in the middle of planting both our 30'x150' Rimol tunnels to winter greens, such as spinach, kale, Swiss chard, Asian greens, arugula, mesclun, etc. We'll be doing markets all winter and they are expected to continue to increase, as did all our summer markets. Great time to be a farmer! Trouble spots this season include spinach germination this fall with three tries in one area; not sure why, but get 100% in other areas. We wonder if the earthworms are eating the seed, as they do our pea seeds! Anyone else with this issue, and any solutions? Low insect pressure, but diseases like downy mildew, powdery mildew, etc. affected many cucurbits. Apple trees and fruit trees were unbelievably prolific. We're trying to sell the organic apples off to CSA's, etc. as we have too many for our markets. Labor force has been up and down, but we have 3 great interns now to help get us caught up and take us into or through the winter. Our root cellar with the cooling system is working great as we start to pile in the root vegetables for the winter/spring sales. Soon it will be packed with over 24 tons of beets, carrots, potatoes, turnips, rutabagas, celeriac, cabbage, leeks, radishes, etc. Cover cropping has been much improved since buying a John Deere (Frontier) overseeder. Simple, quick, and not real expensive. The solar system (10kw) we installed last year has been generating over half our power all year. Wishing all our farming friends a terrific harvest this fall and a restful winter. Hope to see everyone at conferences.

(Fairfax) We're busy frost protecting, irrigating fall raspberries, beans and zucchini. This past season has been very interesting. Amazingly we had the best pepper crop on record. We were still picking large peppers as of today and lots of sizeable red ones. I can only guess, but I'm thinking the cool summer was perfect for fruit set. Makes me realize how

much potential fruit we lose typically to hot temp, aborted flowers, and probably tarnished plant bug. The wet weather seemed to really reduce the TPB pressure. Is it due to lots of insect-eating fungi like *Beauveria bassiana*? There certainly was plenty plant devouring fungi on our farm this year. Luckily the rotting summer lettuce is a distant memory.

### **FROM THE UVM PLANT DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC**

(Ann Hazelrigg)

Downy mildew on basil was identified in the Clinic. This is fairly new disease for New England. The plants I looked at appeared yellowish but turned rapidly black, as if they had been hit by frost on my lab bench. The underside of the leaves were dirty brown and covered with sporangia (spore bearing structures) of the fungus. According to Rob Wick at UMass, the disease can be seed-borne but the single seed lot he tested was negative for the pathogen. The pathogen is very mobile on air currents and can be found in the field and the greenhouse. It thrives in cool humid conditions. Management includes trying to reduce humidity and leaf wetness in the greenhouse. Avoid close, dense plantings and use fans to increase air flow. Remove and destroy infected plants.

I identified a very superficial rot on sweet potatoes as *Fusarium* surface rot. It was fairly firm but soft rotting bacteria was moving in after the original fungus to cause a very smelly rot. Lesions on fleshy roots are circular, light to dark brown, firm, and dry. Decay remains shallow, usually not extending beyond the root's vascular ring. Externally, lesions appear solid brown and are often centered on a broken rootlet. When infected roots are stored for an extended period, the tissue around the lesions dries and becomes mummified. Avoid this disease by avoiding bruising at harvest.

Widespread foliar disease on carrots was called in by a grower. The sample wasn't sent in, but could have been caused by 2 different fungal diseases, or one bacterial disease. Although the disease could have been seed borne, it was probably just related to the consistent rainfall throughout the summer leading to a final "epidemic" in the fall. Rotation is important for minimizing these diseases in the future. Sometimes (like this summer) it is hard to see the effects of good rotation, but it is likely you would have seen the epidemic earlier in the summer without the rotation.