



VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWER NEWS – November 1, 2022

Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension

<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Huntington) Very little sun plus 9.5" of rain made for a slow September this year, both in terms of fall crop growth and storage crop harvest operations, but at least the weather has been cooperative in October to allow us to catch up. We got a few light frosts in late September, as usual in our valley, but we're still picking cherry tomatoes from unheated tunnels, and sunny days of late have allowed transplanted tunnel kale to continue growing vigorously.

We had our worst onion crop ever this year. They looked better than ever in late June, but things fell apart after that, despite nice weather. Downy mildew showed up, and there was a ton of Fusarium causing in-field and post-harvest losses. I think we need to get more serious about greenhouse sanitation, so we'll see if we can reset the clock with some hours logged behind a pressure washer for the greenhouse infrastructure and some disinfectant dips for seedling trays.

We don't typically worry much about deer predation on our crops, but the meager wild apple and forest mast crops have had them doing more damage than normal in our fields. In a first for us, we had deer intentionally poking holes in sweet potato row cover and tearing it apart to get at the vines beneath. Like humans, they typically don't like to mess with the stuff. If anyone wants some newish-but-pock-marked 42'x300' sheets of row cover, let me know.

I'm glad I'm not buying much equipment at the moment. I could use a newer pickup, but I think I'm just going to wait for people's enthusiasm to massively overpay for used ones to subside.

(Westminster) Our root crop harvest is coming along nicely. Winter squash and radishes are all in; there are still a few weeks left of harvesting beets and carrots. Some turnips and rutabagas, too big for the harvester, are left to dig by hand. Almost all root crops did well this year, with the exception of parsnips, which germinated poorly. Maybe due to dry conditions in June when we planted?

This week is the last lettuce harvest. Collards and specialty kales like red and lacinato are finishing up, but we are still shipping large orders of green kale and that should last through November.

Almost all fields have cover crops planted except for those in late-harvested crops where covers wouldn't have time to establish. Five high tunnels are planted with greens for our winter market, which opens mid-December – spinach, salad mix, Asian mix, arugula, and kale.

We raised prices an average of \$2 to \$3 per case this year to reflect higher costs for labor, inputs, and shipping. There were no complaints from our customers – everyone is facing the same inflation. The last Jamaican H2-A employees will leave mid-November, and we're looking to hire a few more local part-time employees for the winter.

(Guildhall) Potato harvest is nearly complete, 3.5 acres to go and we'll be done. We started in on October 11, and have gone nonstop aside from 1 rain day, and a much needed 2-day weekend. Yields have been good, though not last year's historic crop. Quality and sizing have been excellent, and hopefully they continue to remain that way in storage. So far, we've done 72 trucks (200 cwt each) and yields are roughly as follows: golds 325-357 cwt/acre, reds 260 cwt/acre, Peter Wilcox 450 cwt/acre, whites 350 cwt/acre. Last year we made 20' tall piles in the barn out of necessity but suffered quite a bit of bruising because of it. This year we've held most of the piles to 13' to try and lower our cull rate.

We recently hosted the Potatoes USA Executive Committee. The members were all from large farms in Wisconsin, Maine, California, Washington and Idaho. The committee was doing a Northeast tour visiting growers in Maine and Massachusetts. Showing them around the living history museum that is my farm was pretty fun. Honestly, only the Maine rep had seen anything like our place. Discussions around pH, fertility, sprays, and things I do differently (no neonics and no herbicide) were interesting. I've always been impressed by how supportive, open minded, and non-judgmental potato growers are, and this visit was no exception.

(Westminster West) Potato harvest finished, crop has excellent quality and very good yields in all 5 varieties we grow, a special shout out for Carola that customers seem to really like. Bunched carrots about sold out and winter squash all gone, excellent crop this year. Napa wants to get picked real soon, beets being bunched and sold.

A surprise is the celery crop, as we are on the second harvest from the original plant, which never occurred consistently before. A bit behind garlic planting but should get it done this week, about same amount as last year, about all we can handle with the regular crew. Still picking tunnel tomatoes and raspberries! Cover crops seeded and emerging with this great warm weather!

Outdoor farmers' market just wrapped up with a record sales year, now onto the winter market! Pricing was spotty as increases in our spring plants went fine but pushback on vegetable price increases during the summer and fall. Disappointing prices from Hannaford's for winter squash, our biggest crop, but great support from the many co-ops we supply.

(Burlington) Fall harvest is proceeding apace. Enjoying a top-lifter root harvester for the first time, making note of minor modifications to make this winter. Overall quality and yield of fall crops has been good, with notably low wireworm and root maggot damage so far, and a low incidence of Alternaria in Brassicas, likely due to a chilly September. Though the cool and wet September was worrying, all of our crops appear to have caught up during the warmer drier October. I'm always impressed how much growth we can see in the second half of October in a decent autumn.

Summer CSA finished last week with positive feedback from members, and winter CSA opens this week. Always nice to have fewer individuals to manage during our CSA distribution! CSA has a bit of a lag in pricing flexibility, as we are setting our share prices and selling them more than 6 months before giving out any vegetables. After hiking our prices this year by 6 to 8% with zero comments from members, I'm interested whether a second year of steeper share price increases will result in any more comments or attrition. I am guessing not.

This winter we'll be planning for more automation in our tunnel climate controls, streamlining root crop washing, and seeking out the best option to replace our defunct biomass furnace in our greenhouse. Looking forward to catching up with people at conferences as well.

(Elmore) Lots of apples in storage but not so many sales of them. Working with one farmstand and focusing on high quality and bright images near the produce. Had a persimmon harvest in our high tunnel that was looking good until a bear or something climbed the small tree, broke all the branches and ate all the fruit. Perennial vegetable rows continue to feed us with French sorrel making its second crop and sea kale showing a lot of promise. Harvested horseradish; it is so easy to grow and harvest why is it not grown more?

We have not raised prices on anything this year, but all is coming to us at higher prices. When we tried to raise prices on apples, we were told that the big guys are still selling theirs at a much lower price. How to compete with that? Flavor, uniqueness, certified organic and showing up weekly to keep the display looking good.

(Ange-Gardien Quebec) Lots, lots, lots of light! Greenhouse crops are growing fast. Yields are good. Mildew on Tundra spinach. Market is ok as I am selling what's growing. Market prices in Montreal are stagnant but my costs are up, especially shipping. I have been on the road try to sell sorrel. Will see if that works. Sorrel grows especially good here.

(Plainfield NH) Fall harvest is winding down, with the first of our H2A gents heading home and the balance going mid-November. The drought played havoc with the potatoes. We realized about a 30% crop as we were not able to get water to them during tuber initiation and bulking. Turnips, beets have done well but the late planting of carrots is under siege from a herd of deer and the outcome of that is yet to be told.

We picked the last green beans from the field on 10/25, corn about the same and the last fall raspberries on 10/27. Since then we have had the killing frost or two and clean up continues in the field. We've had lots of rain leading to unexpected rapid growth of cover crops in September and October, as well as perennial grasses. I believe the water table could still handle a lot more.

(Little Compton RI) Full steam ahead! Finally doing a good job steaming our winter production tunnels, and the results are remarkable! Direct seeding immediately with all kinds of winter greens that come up weed free is a joy to behold. Hoping the depth of the steam treatment eradicates a new winter greens high tunnel pest: [winter grain mites](#). If you have been growing winter greens in tunnels or greenhouses after about 10 years you may have a run in with this pest.

First evidence is weird silvering on leaves like Bok Choi. These mites lay eggs in-between the leaf layers and eat their way out giving the leaves a weird silver/white look. They have very dark brown/black bodies and fire red legs. You will be hard pressed to see them.

Another late summer/fall pest in our area is the [Hawaiian beet webworm](#). It can make a mess of Swiss chard and beet greens, and less often spinach, it depends on variety. The moth is beige and very small, a quarter the size of corn ear worm. But like most lepidopterous larvae it is easily controlled with a shot of Bt. This is easily done in the fall while spraying the fall Brassicas. We are attentive to keeping the HBW out of our winter greenhouse Swiss chard plantings, so we backpack spray Bt twice.

This fall we suddenly got back into the rain track from down south and lost some fertility with leaching. We discovered Chilean nitrate's ability to get much needed nitrogen to wanting Brassicas. It didn't take much but clearly gave the plants a much better boost than feather meal or bagged chicken manure fertilizer would have provided.

Winter squash is not holding up. It was my misunderstanding that the ultra-dry weather for most of the growing season stalled the need for protectants like copper. Going into the fall I am not sure about this.

(Argyle NY) Amazing warm and sunny fall! All fall storage crops are in now with good yields and quality. Sweet potatoes have very little wire worm damage as opposed to last year. Applying nematodes twice paid off. Broccoli and cauliflower are still coming in but delayed due to *Alternaria*. Hot water seed treatment definitely pays off. Lots of leeks still in the field but it's too warm to start storing them in the greenhouse (standing up in crates).

Winter rye and clover are covering most of the farm now, and still seeding cover crops as ground opens up.

Tunnels are slowly getting planted for winter as summer crops come out. Still have tomatoes, celery, eggplant, peppers, and broccolini in the tunnels that are doing well. Only 3 nights of freezing temperatures so far with 28 degrees being the lowest, so a little bit of heat to keep tunnels in the 30s is paying off. Mixing up our traditional winter planting schedule a lot. Let you know how it goes.

EQUIP SIGN UP DEADLINE IS NOVEMBER 18 IN VERMONT

The Fiscal Year 2023 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) signup date for Vermont NRCS is November 18, 2022. Vermont NRCS has a \$1 million funding pool for Community Scale and Urban Agriculture, in addition to \$236,000 for nutrient management and soil health through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) with the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts.

Producers interested in learning more about the NRCS conservation practices and developing conservation solutions for their operation should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

NEW ENGLAND VEGETABLE AND FRUIT CONFERENCE DECEMBER 13-15

The NEVFC in Manchester NH offers 25 educational sessions with well over 100 presentations for vegetable, berry, and tree fruit growers. Ornamentals, too. Farmer-to-Farmer meetings after each morning and afternoon session bring speakers and farmers together for informal, in-depth discussion. The Trade Show has over 120 exhibitors. Don't miss this opportunity to obtain ideas and information that will have a positive impact on your farm. Check out the schedule and register at <https://newenglandvfc.org/>