



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – November 2, 2020
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www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry

2020 VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWER WEBINARS

Wednesdays from noon to 1:00 p.m. For details of upcoming topics and links to past webinar slides and video recordings see: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/Webinars2020.html>

Nov. 4: Creature Comforts in the Packshed, with Andy Chamberlin, UVM Extension

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Guildhall) Potato harvest finished Nov. 24. Though it dragged out over 3 weeks, we only spent about 9 days actually digging between the rain. 7.25" of rain from Oct. 2 to 24. Potato yields are down by one-third to two-thirds depending on variety. Coupled with strong early sales, we don't have what we'd like to see in the barn, but considering how little it rained this summer, I'm happy to have a crop at all. Potato barn renovations continue, and we've started washing, grading, sizing and bagging in the new packing space, though it's not finished yet.

(Westminster) Our fall harvest is going very well; all our root crops will be in storage by the end of the week. We have plenty of radishes! Watermelon and black radishes, and purple daikon by the binful.

We're cutting our last planting of lettuce. There is plenty of kale left in the fields to pick; the warming temperatures this week will keep that going, although we probably won't break our record of the latest date to pick kale in the field: Dec. 28, 2004.

The pandemic affected our southern markets considerably this year, making them more volatile and less reliable. So I think we'll reconsider our crop mix for next season, growing less lettuce and more root crops. Our new packing line will make that strategy more attractive, too. And the new line will help us work toward our goal of expanding into more grocery chains in Vermont and New England and shipping less produce out of the region.

(Shrewsbury) Our farm dropped our one winter market and two summer markets back in March and increased our summer CSA from about 100 members to nearly 250. It took a little adjusting to our crop plan and weekly farm routines, but we've managed to keep our CSA free-choice and got very positive feedback from our customers this summer. It's really sweet to see how much it means to people to be connected to their vegetable farm.

About two-thirds of our members pick up from a new display cooler in our barn, and we pack and deliver bags for the remaining folks using a google form generated spreadsheet that members use to choose what they'd like. We've really enjoyed the efficiency gains from consolidating our marketing and are conscious to try to make the experience as valuable as possible for our members to maintain a high retention rate.

I'm looking forward next year to planting some pick your own flower gardens for our members, and growing some more fun crops that we haven't done before like melons and fall-plug planted strawberries.

(Elmore) Working to get all potted plants back into the ground before it dips to 15 degrees tonight, Oct. 30. Too cold too early, never enough time to get the farm work done. Sold our last "Vern's brown turkey" fig tree yesterday for indoor growing, of course, outdoors in the summer only. So many people wanted fruit and nut trees and berry plants this year. We are working hard expand our supply. We set up a new drip irrigation system for blueberry plant growing, which has them looking the best in years.

We are keeping better track of sales, going from gut to excel spreadsheets to help us see and not just feel how to proceed. Have a dedicated crew I am grateful for, working in early snows and cold and all during the virus time. I feel next season will be even busier with more demand, so we are working to prepare. The good thing about growing perennial plants is that they get more valuable from year to year as they get larger.

However, our harvested fruit and nut sales are way down as we are having a hard time finding new markets for our produce since three of the main stores/breweries we sell to either laid off most of their crew or closed this year. Most frustrating are the ones that don't return calls or emails or get back to you after you visit.

(Westminster West) Halloween killing freeze, and of course the heater in a tunnel decides to crap out when its 19 degrees outside, and I didn't turn the temp monitor on, ha-ha, trick or treat I guess! But seriously, our last farmers market day was on Halloween and it was great, sold everything I bought except the last two heads of celery. but we can eat those.

Squashes holding up and sales are strong! Sold out of pie pumpkins quickly and last of Delicatas going out this week. Plenty of Butternuts and Honeynuts left, which is good. Grew potatoes this season, first time in years and they were great! Butterballs, purples and golds sold best, might add good old Green Mountain back if I can get seed.

Winter rye with vetch established well and that makes me happy! Plowed up a field that hasn't been used in 45 years; excited to grow on that next year. Hopefully I can find the coulter that fell off in that field by spring! Tomato yields were off in the greenhouse, not sure why. New rootstock graft?

Covid forced some big changes here: marketing, growing mix, staff. Not sure about everything for next year yet, much to think about. I did expand tunnel growing and that has worked out well, more to come!

(E. Montpelier) Crappy potato yield. Too dry. Also had excessive deer browsing. We actually never saw the potatoes flower due to canopy browsing. This was the year that seals the decision, I plan to set up a single line drip system on spuds next year. I kept holding off, part lazy and part not wanting my hobby farm to dry our home well/water system.

(Winchester NH) Our growing season ended definitively last Saturday morning, when the temperature dipped to 18 degrees. Have 0.7 acres of carrots still to harvest, along with some parsnips, turnips, cabbage, spinach, and more greens if they pull through. Last week there was time to clean and disinfect seedling trays and trellising stakes, while we wait for cooler space to free up.

Happy to have nearly pulled through such an uncertain year. CSA and wholesale sales have been strong; irrigation has been key. Covid logistics have been scary, but health has been good. Finally achieved a broccoli harvest without hollow stem -- I think I'd been spraying Solubor on the crops when they were too young, rather than just before heading up. Just about to test out a new high tunnel soil steamer that was purchased by the Cheshire County Conservation District. Soon the steamer will be part of their equipment rentals service.

(Plainfield NH) Pretty much everything harvested by Friday night's severe freeze. Lots of cleaning up and fall pruning awaits us in the raspberries and blues as we are restructuring our ancient plantings. Straw is lined up for mulching the strawberries. It wouldn't break anyone's heart if the winter was open like last winter, allowing us to work outside doing things we don't have time for the other three seasons.

Much time will be spent this winter trying to envision what 2021 will look like for the farm. The ornamentals brokers and greenhouse staff have pretty much agreed not to jump to conclusions based on this season's rapid sell out. People were responding to quarantine, and that could change with a vaccine. The same with retail and wholesale vegetable sales. We don't believe the Fed is going to pump money into local ag and food shelves like it did this past summer, those income spikes likely will not be sustainable. So our plan is to proceed this coming season in planting pretty much as we would in a "normal year" and refrain from any capital improvements or expansion in response to this year's spike in gross sales. Perhaps it is too conservative, but it feels right to the family and staff.

I am pretty excited to have acquired a new no-till drill for cover cropping part of the farm. We have used the NRCS drill a couple of times and have been extremely impressed with stand improvement. Talked at length with the Great Plains rep about the innovative uses that are being discovered and utilized by the farmers who own them. They are pretty expensive (what isn't?) but I believe they will pay out big in our soil improvement strategies.

(Ange-Gardien, Quebec) It has been a good year so far! All the crops are in the warehouse and market/prices are strong. Pandemic made the local market stronger than ever.

Very humid October here. Could not enter the field to lime and apply compost. We even had to plant garlic by hand because we could not get in the field with tractor! Hope to have thick enough frozen crust to lime next week.

Not much sun in October so growth in greenhouse was affected but everything is now ready to pick. We had a good night temperature drop last few night as it got from -2C to -5C to -10C. Good thing we have the infrastructures to smoothen that temperature drop so the plants slowly get ready for deep winter!

This year, we tried to make our own compost with cow manure, poultry manure and straw that we had on the farm. We tried it because the cow manure had a lot of weed seeds. Wow what a job! Takes a lot of equipment and time (more than I expected). We did succeed, as the pile heated to 35C. But that is not enough to kill weed seeds. I would be happy to hear about your experience of "on farm composting"! Should I change recipe or make my pile larger?

(Argyle NY) As we reflect on this past year we are reminded that "it isn't over till it's over." The changes in marketing for us have been drastic and there could be even more as this year closes. We will make decisions over the next few weeks about going to home deliveries or staying in markets with lots of financial and family/workers input.

Last Saturday morning's temperature of 20 degrees put a lot of strain on our farm to get crops inside to minimize damage and cover what we could not. The crew did well with only losing some lettuce out in the field. Most of it was cut and put in the root cellar for the next few weeks of sales.

Crops and weather wise it was a pretty average year with highs and lows, it was just the marketing that made it a banner year as people hunkered down to eat at home and buy local. Though our head lettuce sales were off due to many people having their own garden.

Tunnel crops are running a little behind in growth due to some being planted late but I am hopeful over the next few weeks they will catch up, as the temperatures look good.

TECH TIPS FROM THE UVM EXTENSION AG ENGINEERING TEAM

Giving a Dairy Barn New Life at New Leaf Organics (Postharvest Case Study).

Jill Kopel owns and operates New Leaf Organics in Bristol, Vermont and has over 19 years of farming experience. After many years of growing crops and growing the business she made the decision to invest significantly in her wash/pack space to improve many aspects of the farm.
<https://go.uvm.edu/newleaf>

Project Planning for Postharvest Efficiency, Profitability & Food Safety (Free 8-Part Packshed Webinar).

A video series focused on postharvest upgrades for your farm. Whether your project is organizing a relatively simple outside wash station or building a full packshed from scratch, we share the principles and practice with examples to help you make the most of it.
<http://go.uvm.edu/phwebinar>

NOV. 20 DEADLINE TO APPLY FOR EQUIP AND AMA PROGRAMS WITH NRCS

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Vermont announced that Nov. 20 is the next cut-off date to apply for conservation program assistance through the Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). While both these conservation programs are offered through a continuous signup, NRCS makes periodic funding selections throughout the year, and this is the first deadline. NRCS conservation programs support farmers, ranchers, forestland managers and landowners by helping them conserve natural resources through both technical and financial assist for a variety of conservation activities, such as cover crops, rotational grazing systems, field buffers, animal waste management systems, and restoration and management of wildlife habitat. Learn more by at <https://bit.ly/36XqVH5> or contact your local NRCS office, see <http://bit.ly/32b21z8>

WHOLE FARM REVENUE PROTECTION PROGRAM COVERS MORE GROWERS

USDA Risk Management Agency (RMA) made changes to the WFRP insurance program to accommodate diversified producers and those selling to direct and local markets. With these changes, vegetable and berry growers should now have a crop insurance option for the 2021 crop year. Enrollment deadline for late tax year filers is November 20, and deadline for all others is March 15, 2021. For more information, contact Jake Jacobs at jake.jacobs@uvm.edu

GROWER INPUT SOUGHT ON STRAWBERRY RESEARCH

As part of a new Northeast SARE project “Advancing Strawberry Production in the Northeast” researchers from UNH, Cornell and UVM want to learn more about the practices you use and the challenges you face in strawberry production. Your responses will help them better understand the diversity of practices used in the Northeastern U.S. and Canada, and will inform research and outreach for improving strawberry production on your farm! It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. To thank you for your time, you can choose to be entered into a drawing to win fabulous prizes. Learn more and take the survey at: https://unh.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2nlFpEZhejOE0Pr

RESEARCHERS WANT TO KNOW ABOUT FARMER PRIORITIES

Researchers at the University of Maine have developed the New England Farmer Priorities Survey to better understand the needs of farmers in the face of current challenges, including COVID-19 and weather variability. They will use your responses to identify specific areas where agricultural outreach could be improved to better meet these needs. Participants can enter a drawing for one of two \$100 Visa gift cards. The survey asks questions about your priorities as a farmer, your access to supportive resources, and your responses to certain challenges. It should take approximately 25 minutes to complete, and your responses will remain anonymous and not be shared. Questions? ruth.sexton@maine.edu, or call 605-627-1013. To take the survey, go to: https://umaine.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_820cQsHxiy7DaAt

STUDENT SEEKS PEOPLE WITH FARMING AND GADENING EXPERIENCES

A UVM graduate student's research project comparing market and non-market vegetable production is looking for individuals who have experience in both, and are willing to be interviewed about it, either outdoors or over the phone. Maybe you used to garden and now work on a farm, or vice versa. If you are interested in participating or want to learn more about this study, contact Sam Bliss at samcbliss@gmail.com