



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News –December 10, 2013  
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## REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Jericho) Winter greens are cranking along nicely, now starting first cuts on the last couple of houses, moving into second cuts on the others. We're patting ourselves on the back for doing a good job hardening off the greens this fall and managing house ventilation and row covers, such that we've yet to have any cold weather impact to the plants, even with several 5 degree nights under our belts. We've been pushing down our threshold for when to cover, double cover, etc. and finding that we can get away with a lot less covering that we've done in the past and greens seem more vibrant because of it, plus less work for us. Belatedly finishing transplanting into our new heated tunnel, which is awesomely big, and an exciting new learning opportunity. Cut the last large leaf spinach from the field Dec. 2, with some frost damage loss where the remay had a hole or two, but otherwise great stuff! Cut baby spinach in the field with no covering up until the first really cold spell in mid-November; it went through many nights in the 15-18 degree range with no tip burn. Harvested it all before the 5 degree nights, and saw tip burn on remaining leaves after that. Pulled the last leeks on Dec. 6; we have been storing them unwashed upright in bulk bins with roots-on which is working great so far. Probably won't get to test this storage method much beyond three weeks though as they are selling as fast as we clean them. Wholesale market demand is strong. Winter farmers' market demand seems down a bit, but perhaps the late Thanksgiving or the change in market schedule has thrown customers for a loop. Looking forward to the holidays and time with family.

(Weare NH) I continued to be amazed at how much the kale is still producing in the field. I have it covered with one layer of light remay and though it is a pain to deal with when it gets wet and frozen, it seems to make a real difference. It also seems to quite effective in keeping deer away, as the kale I have not covered looks like naked palm trees. I am trying over wintering scallions and carrots in raised beds with caterpillar tunnels. In the high tunnel, lettuce, spinach and arugula are growing well. The one winter market I am in is a bit disappointing as the inside location is not complete and I have had to cancel my attendance when it is held outside. Greens, not to mention me, do not do well in wind chills of 20 degrees. My direct sales are better than expected, and I have been getting more inquiries from cafes and the like for greens. Working on infrastructure projects and finalizing crop plans for next year.

(Little Compton RI) The last two hard freezes have been quite informative. We spent 48 hours before the first deep freeze grabbing every beet and carrot we could find and squirreling them away in a rented cooler. We had so much to do we just couldn't get to a quarter acre of beautiful headed-up broccoli. At the height of the first freeze we checked on the broccoli to find it frozen hard. For kicks we picked some for dinner and it cooked up just as fresh tasting as ever. We knew we had a large order in two weeks so we thought we were clever when we cut 12 bushels and stuck it in some vacant freezers. The day came to deliver the broccoli and we tested its thaw-ability to find it turned to mush and stank to high heaven. In a pinch, we checked the original field to find some beautiful but slightly wind-burned broccoli. Still firm and quite sellable. Even some that we couldn't fit in the freezers and had kept in the regular cooler for over a week was in remarkably good shape. The same was true for some of field lettuce. The lettuce we had put under hoops and remay ended up getting damaged from the ferocious winds which shredded the remay and even worse stretched it so much it ended up smacking up and down on the lettuce and virtually sanded it to death. Bottom-line: don't assume a couple of hard freezes will do in a crop. In the last two weeks the thermometer made two trips down to 14 degrees but it was the drying aspect of the cold fronts that did the worst damage. Next season we will get away from thousands of feet of single-hooped remay covered beds and shift to a temporary greenhouse like a 18' or 20' gothic style setup, much like our Haygrove, using shoe-lace cross-over ropes held in place with tree anchors. We will still use hoops and remay inside the greenhouse but will not have the winds torturing every piece of remay. It should be easy to pull on and off without wind inside. Meanwhile our local winter markets are down about 12% except for the Saturday before Thanksgiving. Sales and general demand for produce appears weak; mostly old faithful customers; not a lot of new faces.

(Warren) Storage crops moving faster than expected. Most likely sold out by the end of January. Still picking away at high tunnel salad greens. Getting just enough warmth each week for things to thaw out. Getting pretty sick of picking em though. Each year I'm amazed at claytonia's ability to regrow in 2-3 weeks this time of year.

(Westminster West) Finally put all sales in for the year and though a struggle early in the season it still wound up 12% over last year, so color me happy! Started a large scale drainage project last month, I realized that improving what we own is less expensive than moving or buying more land. Already I can see the effects in water movement. Ordered another greenhouse, I always say that is it, but then a few years later we seem to buy another.

(Ange-Gardien, PQ) Another spinach harvest last Thursday. Mild and sunny weather makes the winter crops grow. Even with low sunlight, fan would come on the unheated greenhouse as the temps would go over 15 degrees Celsius between 11:30 and 14:00. Green onions are waiting in the greenhouse soil for proper conditions. A little bit of night crawler on spinach. Sold all my 'endives' in 10 seconds. Market here is just eager for leafy green in the winter.

(Montpelier) First winter market was this past Saturday. Attendance was good but sales remain flat. The proliferation of craft and gift markets on Saturdays must be having an impact. Due to a quirky schedule a number of growers have pulled out. Not sure how our customers will respond to something that does not happen on a regular schedule. GH 3 has a very busy mole in it. Rather frustrated trying to figure out how to do him in. More for the mess he makes and the soil he is moving out of the beds and into the pathways. The mild weather has been good so far and the spinach is recovering from the hard early harvesting required due to the very mild October. CSA sales for the winter are the same as last year. Value-added sales are really doing very well with a lot of interest. No late season deer at all this fall. Largely due to the high wild apple forage available to them. It certainly is not my reputation as a hunter. End of year is rolling around, seed catalogues are showing up, and already thinking about how to go at things a bit differently next season. Perhaps I can corner the market on Vermont Grown kumquats?

(Plainfield) The long lasting warmth of this fall somehow still left me with a bunch of end of season projects undone. We will pull our plastic mulch first thing in the spring. Managed to get 3 hoop houses recovered, just good luck in terms of the weather. New plastic lets so much more light in! Working on end of year bookkeeping, and making plans for the coming season. Late fall crops all sold out; nice to be done. Overall, a good growing season for us. Grateful for the variety of soil types on the farm, which gives us adaptability to the extremes of our climate.

(Burlington) We like the look and growth of the Salanova lettuces in our high tunnels. Showing good hardiness, nice growth, and several of the incised cultivars also showing good downy mildew and other disease resistance. We also liked it in the field, and are contemplating moving all of our salad mix lettuce toward Salanovas from direct seeding. Storage crops are looking good, though a bit of Alternaria rot is showing up in our otherwise lovely potatoes. Wondering if our higher humidity, higher temp suberizing early in the autumn fostered the organism, since we haven't suberized prior and also not seen the disease. Loving that we now have remote temperature and humidity monitoring installed in our storage rooms; next step will be adding a control function so I can adjust things while I sip coffee at a Montreal cafe.

(Westminster) Winter greens are in full swing! Very pleased with the overwhelming retail and wholesale demand. We have about 5,000 sq. ft. planted, split up into three tunnels. This is our winter experiment. We are trying to gather as much info (while still being productive) as possible. I can see now what great info was shared at last year's winter tunnel meeting. Unfortunately, I did not have enough winter growing knowledge to absorb it all and ask enough questions. We are experimenting with Ag 19, leaving it on or taking it off every morning. We are also trying one house with 28-degree heat and no cover; the most luxurious house and the best so far; dry and growing like gangbusters. Spinach and baby kale growing and selling well, very pleased with our salad mix. We left lettuce out of that mix completely as it was a weak link. Disappointed in full size head sales, feel like they do not justify their GH space. Also hoping that someone will buy the stupid amount of arugula we planted!

(Monkton) Glad to have garlic and strawberries mulched before the deep cold arrives this week. Hoophouse greens continue stalwartly but we are very glad to have things slowing down a bit. We have time to continue work with the Farm Viability Program (thanks Richard Wiswall and Caitlin Jenness!) and to consider interesting advice on Pollinator Habitat Enhancement from Jane Sorenson's UVM students. Jane (Riverberry Farm) does a great job with those kids. Our farming community includes so many talented and generous people. In spite of many challenges this season, we end the year feeling thankful.

(S. Royalton) Winter markets have been strong so far with high demand for winter greens. Salad greens and bunching mustards still going strong under three layers of row cover in tunnels and still harvesting cherriette radishes. Some minor slug and cutworm damage on the spinach but with the amazing growth from the fall weather it hasn't been a problem. I'm interested to see how well the spinach keeps producing compared to other years when it wasn't so vigorous.

(Durham CT) The blizzard last February took down five of our six hoophouses. For a few weeks we were able to harvest in small pockets where the houses didn't completely crush our winter greens. This felt like exploring the Titanic at the bottom of the ocean! After that we hired a construction company to demolish and cart away the mangled metal, wood and plastic. Then this past spring we moved into a much-reduced hoophouse area which meant fewer greenhouse tomatoes. We're now growing spinach, claytonia, kale, komasuna, arugula, mache and mustard. Everything is thriving in the two houses we have. Some of our late (mid-Oct) plantings of kale are now coming on. The lower light doesn't mean that things stop growing, they just slow down.

Customers are so glad to see us back in the game; restaurants, farmer's market and CSA. We did pretty well this year, all things considered. In the fall, we decided to put up a lot of low tunnels with kale, carrots, lettuce and mustards. Low tunnels need to be secured very well. We use sandbags on each hoop, and don't make them too long or they become an easy target for big winds. Low tunnels can be very effective and are great for planting late lettuce and carrots, etc. but they aren't conducive to farmers like us of Medicare age; we really miss walking into a hoop house and not having to bend over to do everything. Somewhere along the way our Governor found emergency money for affected farmers and now we are slated to put up two more houses and we are going to have just about as much square footage as used to. Our plans for the new houses may include raspberries, ginger, more greens and peppers, not sure yet. We are grateful for all the support that we've experienced.