



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – Dec. 18, 2012
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Montpelier) The high tunnel conference was great; it takes a couple of days back at my place for all the information to sink in. I will try a number of different things in the coming year. Spinach houses are looking good; nitrogen level appears insufficient for the density of the planting. There are benefits to heavy seeding rates as well as drawbacks. Need to run some numbers. Heavily seeded spinach is easier and quicker to harvest. Yield per bed is also up about 20-30 % but I feel quality is inferior to the transplanted and then picked method. We are also spending a lot more time washing and picking out the yellowed cotyledons. Harvest is difficult trying to bunch and cut due to the density of the planting. So quite a few more torn or damaged leaves. What is the best seeding rate to try and get the best of both methods? Downy and powdery mildew have struck the salad house; Oscarde in particular is getting it bad. Other varieties in the same row are holding up well. Harvesting and cutting things back and then spraying Milstop and Cease to get it under control. As I do every winter I am again considering growing spinach only next year. No salad. The spinach just hands down gives me fewer issues. The continued mild weather is creating problems since the houses won't freeze and stay that way. That means moisture and temperatures stay in the ideal range for disease. Sales remain strong and prices are holding up for wholesale as well as retail.

(Jericho) A great growing season after several seasons that were OK or worse; keeps us hopeful that we do know something about what we're doing out there in the fields. Fall root crops were great and kept us harvesting long into November, might even pull some more parsnips out this week. One of the best allium years ever as far as production goes, though the more onions we grow the more we seem to battle various rots in storage. Loving the winter growing season, inspired by the high tunnel conference; dreaming of becoming a winter-only farmer.

(Shrewsbury) A little over half a crop of blueberries this year. Due to March warmth? SWDs arrived late July, no fruit damage detected.

(Bristol) We are grateful for a good year in 2012. Strawberries, garlic, potatoes, tomatoes, onions and sweet potatoes did particularly well and our hay crop was the best in several years. After over 30 years of farming we are grateful to be learning new things and to have a son working with us and planning his own new projects. There is optimism and energy in the farming community in spite of looming challenges: erratic weather, SWD, garlic bulb nematode, annual late blight flare-ups, flat produce prices along with increasing cost of supplies, and an (over)abundance of veggies for the "buy-local" market.

(Rochester) Winter's late arrival allowed us time to get things done that would normally wait until spring. We took up the trellis wire and posts where 1,200 feet of older raspberry beds will be pulled up and turned under in April. Two rows of blueberries already pruned means two rows less in the rush to beat bud break. Root stock is ordered for spring planting. The malfunctioning electronic pruner can be sent off for service. Snow blower is attached to the tractor and ready to roll. Nice to see the farm put to bed. Looking forward to some reading.

(Royalton) Winter gardens have been put to rest, though the hoopouses continue to crank out greens. I have to time the harvest during midday, when the greens thaw back out. Arugula, mustard, bok choy, cilantro, romaine lettuce. Selling at farmers' market for \$13/lb. Garlic got hit heavily by onion maggot; potatoes are showing signs of some blight. The onions are the best ever; solid and firm, good size. Worried about the lack of forage for rodents in the forest and the effect they may have on my seeded garlic.

(Plainfield NH) In fear of a storm, we have been cramming machinery undercover, unplugging hoses and stashing lugs and baskets. We are cleaning out ditch lines and chipping brush along woodlines, but that will all stop if we get major snow. We have yet to clean and service our 26 greenhouse furnaces and start the pilots. We have to melt snow off because our greenhouses are situated too close to one another to get a tractor through, and the early winter storms when the sun is weakest are the ones that worry me the most in terms of snow and ice accumulation. A mound of desk work faces the remaining 6 full timers and will occupy us this month as we ceased shipping potatoes and squash today. Am experimenting with midwinter releases of beneficials in the greenhouse to get a head start on pests overwintering in the ornamental plant stock house. That is where we do all the germination of next year's vegetables, so I am trying to introduce enough beneficials to suppress spikes of whitefly, thrips and aphids we always get in early February. Pretty hard to imagine that greenhouse tomatoes will be started in 3-4 weeks. I haven't gone Christmas shopping, or ordered tomato seed.

(Hinesburg) Productive season! Finally a smoothly operating solar pump and drip irrigation. Noticeable improvements in quality and yield from practices learned in Bionutrient Food workshops. Drenches through irrigation water, and seed inoculation for all seed were most noticeable. Swede midge damage on every Red Russian kale plant, but Winterbor and Lacinato kale in the same bed had no noticeable damage. Brussels sprouts in adjacent bed showed no damage. Did not grow cabbage or broccoli. If I don't grow Red Russian, will I see no midge damage, or will the insects attack a less favored variety?

(Middle Granville NY) Still above average temps; have all the greenhouses open anytime it's above freezing to build hardiness and slow growth. Still harvesting bok choy, leeks, kale, Brussels and more out of the fields. Am seeing a lot more caterpillar/worm damage in GH's this year; need to spray BT.

(Plainfield) A solid season, though a bit intense with insect pressure and drought. On the other hand, a hot sunny summer grows a lot of nice produce if you can get by the bugs and pump enough water. Happy with the amount of land in cover crops, hope to do more of this. Local wholesale demand remains strong, sold out by Thanksgiving. Resolutions for the coming season: plant less, do a better job with weeds and insect problems, maximize production from high tunnels. Smaller gross, bigger net. Happy Holidays to this great network of growers.

(Little Compton RI) We returned from the great High Tunnel conference with many nuggets of advice to tweak into our winter production. This year we were so flat out with field harvests that we missed important dates for getting indoor direct seedings in. With this warm weather we are breathing a sigh of relief as plantings in the greenhouses are exploding. We haven't yet covered any greenhouse plantings and they are the better for it. Much lower incidence of Botrytis and Alternaria. Keeping your house well ventilated all winter was a nugget from the conference and we are now true believers. It's not the cold that is the challenge during winter growing it is the humidity: wind and fresh air are paramount. Last year, like this year, we were late on one spinach house. We felt we needed to speed things up a bit and kept the house under ventilated on purpose to get some heat to push the planting along. That part of the plan worked great until we saw some specks showing up on the spinach leaves and each day more until the whole house was covered with Cladosporium! In hind sight it was the lack of fresh air that pushed the disease. Another nugget came as a warning: there is a broadleaf herbicide that is showing up in fresh manure and composts. It is used in hay fields etc. but survives in hay bales or cow manure and may persist for several years. Warning: test all your manure and compost sources. Our 9 sling totes of compost arrive this week and we will be planting samples from each tote with fresh beans seeds to see if there is any of this herbicide present.

(Weare NH) Still working on framing the end walls of the new high tunnel. Don't plan on skinning it until spring, but that's a busy time, so want to have as much done as possible. Checked out our other field, a bit disappointed in the growth of the cover crop, winter rye and jerry oats; would have thought with the mild weather it would have grown a lot more. Spinach, lettuce and arugula under caterpillar tunnels looking very good. Hope to have a nice harvest in late February to early March.

(Argyle NY) 2012 was an average year for us with more insects/diseases than most, especially Alternaria on Brassicas and Purple Blotch on Leeks. However, the diversity of crops always balances out the losses. Farmers' markets were strong all year, especially last winter's market which exceeded summer market in sales! This is due mostly to profitable greens from high tunnels which have strong demand from local customers year-round. With recent cloudy, cool weather, some downy mildew started, but just on Refugio lettuce out of 10 varieties for salad mix. A spray of Double Nickel, a new biofungicide from Certis, cleared it up. Without heat, we pray for sunny days. Our trials of spinach over 2 years led us to a top 10 mix of Raccoon, Space, Donkey, Reflect, Giant Winter, Lombardia, Corvair, and several others (see postings of High Tunnel Conference presentations, below). We're trialing 20 spinach varieties this winter with Pigeon from High Mowing and others looking good. We trialed the Salanova lettuces for Johnny's and saw how wonderful they are, so we are excited to grow them all season in 2013 for both our mini-heads and our salad mix; large, dense heads spaced 6" apart yielded tremendous weight in record time with quality, one length leaves for a perfect mix. We use Biothrips netting for flea beetles and Protek Net for cabbage moths; considering netting the blueberries against SWD.

NOFA JOURNEY FARMER PROGRAM

This is a two year program for beginning farmers in the first few years of running their own farming enterprise in Vermont. The program provides resources and opportunities to increase their knowledge base and develop skills. The program provides a farmer mentor, a \$500 educational stipend, free admission to NOFA Vermont workshops and conferences, business planning support, and technical assistance from NOFA staff. In addition, Journey Farmers become part of a learning community of aspiring farmers and farmer mentors. Applications are due by Jan. 15, see: www.nofavt.org/beginning-farmer/journey-farmer or contact caitlinjenness@nofavt.org or 434-4122 x28.

2012 HIGH TUNNEL CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ON-LINE

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/HighTunnelConference2012.html>

2013 TRI-STATE GREENHOUSE IPM WORKSHOPS

Manchester, ME, Jan. 8; Durham, NH Jan. 9; Burlington VT Jan. 10.

This year's program focuses on soil aspects of greenhouse plant production; Matthew Krause, Plant Disease Specialist at Bioworks, will talk about how fungal treatments work to protect plant roots from disease. Brian Krug and Cheryl Smith of UNH will provide step-by-step guidance on how to test irrigation water and soil to refine your plant nutrition regime, reduce diseases and improve plant health. There will be a hands-on demo of using nematodes to manage soil pests. Preregistration required. See: <http://www.uvm.edu/~entlab/> or call Cheryl Frank 802-656-5434 or Margaret Skinner 802-656-5440.

VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWERS ANNUAL MEETING

Monday, January 28, 2013 in Montpelier. Great program, details at

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

UPCOMING MEETINGS GALORE

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