



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – December 2, 2020
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VT VEG AND BERRY WEB SITE HAS MOVED

After many years of service the web site www.uvm.edu/vtveganberry has expired. A new site for its content has been created at: <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>
This new site merges access to UVM's tree fruit and grape pages with vegetables, berries and high tunnel content. It is not yet complete, but getting there, thanks to the UVM Extension web team. Please update your bookmarks if you have them.

2020 VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWER WEBINARS

Slides and recordings of past webinars, and list of planned webinars now posted at:
<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/vermont-vegetable-and-berry-grower-webinar-series>

TODAY from noon to 1:00 p.m. Bags, Liners, Containers - So Many Options – Chris Callahan will present slides showing the range of containers, bags, and liners used on produce farms. So many options and such a frequent question on the VVBGA listserv. We'll take a look at what most people are using specific items for, and how they like using them. We'll also talk about some of the nuance of each option and how things can go wrong. Chris Callahan leads the UVM Extension Agricultural Engineering program and is Director of the Northeast Center for the Advancement of Food Safety.

Join the webinar using your computer or smartphone using this link:
<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/292726101> or by dialing in by phone +1 (224) 501-3412 and enter this passcode when prompted: 29272610.

Dec. 9: Adding Tree Fruit to a Diversified Farm - Terry Bradshaw

Dec 16: VVBGA Meet and Greet. Lisa McDougall, Justin Rich, Andy Jones

DEADLINE TO APPLY FOR CFAP2 FUNDING IS DEC. 11

A reminder to check this program out if you haven't. Growers are reporting that is easy to apply for. It pays any farm growing "specialty crops" about 9 to 10% of your 2019 gross sales. And unlike a lot of other programs, this money is not means-tested. This is an unusual level of direct payment available to small, diversified specialty crop farms. Here's the link for info and application: <https://www.farmers.gov/cfap>. For one-on-one support you can also call 877-508-8364 to speak with "a USDA employee ready to offer assistance at the FSA call center."

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Huntington) I went out and took some soil penetrometer readings this weekend and got some interesting results. We have been doing some more shallow tillage with a high-speed disc harrow and I wanted to see if it was making any sort of plow pan at its ~4" working depth, as no-till evangelist's claim will happen.

Testing some fields that had oats and peas planted late-August, I found zero evidence of any shallow plow pan, and was kind of surprised to find no real consistent plow pan at any depth. The penetrometer readings increased up to near 300 psi (the red zone you're supposed to avoid) at ~8-9" in some spots but was able to push deeper with only a slight increase in pressure in those spots. In others I was able to go ~16"+ deep without entering the red zone on the meter. I then moved out of the field into the hedge row and found more-or-less the same pattern. We do have gravel and rocks, so it's very easy to get a high reading if you encounter a hard object like that, as well.

I then tested some wheel tracks in late brassicas that have not seen any fall tillage nor cover crops, and the soil was compacted above 300 psi almost immediately, as one would imagine following a season of tractor traffic.

My current theory is that tillage in our sandy loam soils is seemingly mitigated by intense cover cropping, our relatively light axle loads, and proper tire inflation pressure in the field. Additionally, shallow tillage with high-speed disc harrows that carry most their weight on a large diameter rear roller and the tractor's 3-point hitch appear to not lead to the infamous plow layer smearing that conventional tandem discs are renowned for.

(Westminster) We're still cutting field spinach and picking kale. Plenty of storage crops to pack out through the winter and keep workers busy. We're also getting ready to mulch strawberries, and to start the Winter Market at the farmstand, opening Dec. 11 on Fridays and Saturdays. We are also looking forward to enough ice so we can host community pond hockey, as we always do.

We were sorry to hear of the passing of Jack Lazor of Butterworks Farm, a cherished friend and colleague and a much-admired farmer, one of the first to introduce organic farming to Vermont.

(Guildhall) Keeping the potato barn at 37 degrees has been challenging due to the relatively warm weather. Storage quality is generally good, though there is some bruising on varieties that were windrowed too early in the morning on cold days in October. A lesson in the importance of patience I suppose, but with the rain and frost-induced anxiety of October, I'm not confident I wouldn't do the same thing again.

(Rochester) The two Thanksgiving markets we usually do--indoor events--were cancelled due to the pandemic but sales of value-added goods have switched to online ordering and curbside pickups. We making about the same sales without the expense and effort of physically traveling and setting up a booth. It's another way the pandemic has been the mother of invention.

(Burlington) Picking broccoli on December 1st reminds me that a hail-Mary late cover crop seeding is a good idea. Though it doesn't work every year, our early November planting now looks pretty good. Crops are indoors and storing well; I wish I could order a modestly dry autumn every year. Tunnels are growing quickly with the mild temperatures, hoping we don't run through them all too quickly and therefore lack green things later for our winter CSA.

Thinking ahead to 2021 I have to remind myself that we need to warm up the soil in our cucumber house prior to planting, as we had much better stand establishment May of 2020 when we closed up the tunnel to bake for 7-10 days prior to transplanting. Likewise, I need to get on the *Pediobius* (beneficial insects) train, as bean beetles have decimated our snap beans the past two years.

The Greenhouse Tomato Trellis overhead hooks from Nolt's were so much quicker and easier to manage than wooden stakes for our indoor determinate tomatoes, and we plan to convert our indoor peppers to the same system next summer. Looking forward to better hot-weather salad with a shift from row covers to insect netting for our summer plantings, and also to growing more of the really excellent DM resistant basil bred by Rutgers, which will pair nicely with many of the new hyloom tomatoes now available for purchase. 2020 was an awful year in so many ways, but I still get excited about next growing season, and I am happy for that.

(Elmore) Warm, cold, warm, cold. That seems to be the mantra this year. Gives us a lot of time to get things done, stay in shape and learn how to stay warm and dry as we work outside in constantly changing conditions.

Planted pear trees, mulberry trees and plum trees last week ground still soft and workable. Planting pine nut seeds and hazelnuts in metal hardware cloth, hoping to get a harvest and not just feed the voles and red squirrels all winter. The key is to plant as close as possible to when the ground freezes. this year it keeps freezing and thawing again and again.

Got our new "Missouri gravel beds" built and filled with pea stone. Will be digging a lot of trees to plant in them and see if it is really true that you can gently pull them out in midsummer in full leaf and transplant them without a pot or heavy earth around their roots. Exciting to be a pioneer of sorts in Vermont.

My physical therapist says that we farmers are "agricultural athletes." This has sure been a year to test our athletic skills with the interesting weather and new challenges of working together outdoors in the cold or heat when so many others are holed up in houses and offices. We keep planting and growing food-producing plants because it gives us hope that many will harvest and be nourished by the work we do now here in Elmore on a snow covered hillside farm.

(Plainfield NH) Wholesale orders are still extremely strong, and we are moving with some speed through our root crops. Weather has been kind to us thus far, and getting some outdoor greenhouse repair and maintenance wedged in. Inventorying greenhouse supplies and getting ready to go for spring 2021. Most of the machinery has been assessed, maintained and repaired. The last of our H2A Jamaicans went flew south on the 11/15 and productivity has slowed, but I am pleased with how much still gets done around here in the diminishing days.

Next week we will try to get the strawberries mulched, it took a long fall to see them finally at a dormant state, and optimism runs moderately high around here that there is a potential for a good crop again due to good population density, age of beds and size of leaves. Mulching these days has as much to do with winter protection as it does discouraging deer feeding. If the winter remains moderately open, we will look forward to perhaps mulching the blueberries and get some more pruning done.

Cover crops look pretty good; even some hail Mary oats that were sown in late October are up and at least providing some root structure, and the peas and oats I no-tilled in the old strawberry bed are leaving an impressive amount of biomass above ground. Soils have been sampled in greenhouses and waiting for early results.

(Argyle NY) We now have everything harvested finally (last of carrots yesterday!) except winter leeks which are outside covered in Tyvar. Before the rains, we got rowcovers and tarps picked up, and some final tilling of brassicas. Still getting straw down over the garlic and in the strawberry paths, but field work is coming to an end after an inch of rain yesterday. Still picking spinach outside and a few herbs, but all other greens for sales are from our high or low tunnels. Of particular note is the celery that has done amazing in the high tunnel and continues to produce. Another farmer planted some early in the spring and picked celery stems all summer and made a huge profit on it. Our plants are huge, tall and great quality (planted in July) so we will see how long they survive, and get numbers to calculate profit!

We are starting to see a few insect and disease issues in the tunnels like: Cladosporium, white mold, gray aphids, and powdery mildew. All minor, but we will be proactive as best we can. Otherwise, growth in the tunnels has been phenomenal due to the warmer temps and protection on the few really cold nights. Steaming of the soils was not done due to time constraints this fall, but the weed pressure is much lower after 3 years of steaming. Claytonia is our worse weed so far! Our root cellar is packed full with over 20 tons of crops, after finally harvesting the late-planted potatoes that would not die!

After 34 years of farmers' markets being our primary outlet, we are reducing them and going full speed this winter on our on-line business with pre-order pickups in 3 locations and home delivery, which we have been refining since March. Stay tuned for how it works out! We are starting to scout for full-time workers for the 2021 season and beyond. Getting older and need to work less hours next year:). Meeting with our farm accountant this week to see where we stand for year-end and figure out what we will purchase in December. Seeds, seeds, and more seeds. Exciting to think about another spring?

(Little Compton RI) After the worst summer drought in my farming history, we are slowly climbing out of our ground water deficit! Though none of the indicator ponds are filling up yet. Big worry if they don't replenish by February, we will come up short again in summer. We learned from the past to keep crops as evenly watered as possible. Not making the mistake of letting them get behind. It seems to take twice as much (time) and effort to rehydrate the ground under thirsty plants. To this end we walked away from two farms that had hand dug wells knowing the crops would run out of water before the crops made cross the finish line.

On the other side of the biblical drought, this was the best retail year in our 40-year history. PPP was great too, but don't like the threat of having to give it back next year! Jury out on that one. Hope everyone took advantage of the C~19 Schedule F refund. That will cover my retail tax bill.

Not knowing where we would be with Covid, we planted our winter houses early and plan on removing the top covers to let the rain drive down the excess salts; etc. We have tried achieving the same ends with sprinklers but nothing cleanses the earth like mother nature.

We're taking a large chunk of retail gains and investing in surrounding another eight acres of prime vegetable land with a woven wire deer fence. At ten dollars a foot, we will expense this for years but I have to have another eight acres of deer free land to grow beans, romaine, cabbage, radicchio, etc. that deer just kill us on each year. And the list keeps growing! This year the salad bar expanded into leeks and field tomatoes.

We are also striving to be compliant with FSMA requirements and protocol. The last thing we need is for one of us to be the poster child for selling E-coli tainted romaine or what have you. The other big issue for many farmers around here is the new Whole Foods Market 5 million insurance policy required to cover fresh greens. For the small grower, this will kick us out of the Whole Foods Market "wet aisle."