



VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWER NEWS – February 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

VVBGA ANNUAL MEETING RECORDINGS AVAILABLE

Here are the [slides of all presentations](#) at Annual Meeting, and the [YouTube playlist](#) with 18 individual videos of the presentations.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Burlington) I found it easy to forget about the effect of subzero temperatures the last couple of winters when it was relatively warm. This winter we are seeing significantly more damage to our baby lettuce than we have in the past two winters. Spinach and kale look OK, and the parsley and cilantro have been surprisingly hardy. Otherwise, storage crops continue to look good, with plentiful roots, cabbages and squash still coming out of storage.

We are aiming to get better at our succession winter cropping and hoping we can squeeze in baby bok choy in a vacant bed before we need to turn it around for tomatoes and cucumbers in later April. We will see how fast it grows. Looking for that magic spinach that has broad downy mildew resistance but also field resistance to Cladosporium.

(Guildhall) An odd winter thus far in sales. Mid-November to New Years was unusually slow, and brokers were paying \$10 cwt. January, typically our slowest sales month, has been great for sales and the brokers are paying anywhere from \$12 to \$22, depending on quality and variety.

Crop planning for 2022 hasn't begun in earnest but it certainly looks like we'll be increasing our acreage of both reds and golds. Whites aren't as forgiving of the often-high pH soil on our land, and even when they're perfect we find we're competing with Maine farms. The good news is the potatoes have kept well so far, but we've still well over a million pounds to move.

A major bottleneck with business slamming, is that there's a limit to how fast we can make loads due to the antiquity of our potato house. For example, if a broker orders a load of A's in 50# bags (26 skids), they're accustomed to a normal potato farm being able to make that in a day. It takes us 5 days to make it, and then we will have another 26 skids of Chefs and Creamers that were made while sizing the A's for the order. I hope a modern potato storage gets built here soon.

(Elmore) The VVBGA Annual Meeting was a great day for seeing what other growers are doing and for being inspired to do some new things. We are working hard on new inventory management and planning strategies. Helps to have young crew experienced with excel spreadsheets and working in google drive so we can work on it and make changes together.

We have a good feeling about this season upcoming, with some good preparation and direction we can be growing smarter and more successfully than before.

The super cold temps have us running to get frozen pipes repaired twice now. Hiring earlier in the season and hiring more crew so we can make sure to cover the tasks needed and hoping this will pay off in higher sales and better-quality crops.

(Plainfield NH) Wholesaling of root crops comes to an end this week. Our pack shed will be converted into a space to seed, set up the pot and flat filler, and gear up for the impending bedding plant season. Our storage/pack barn has turned out to be a great multi use space, and it's hard to admit that I once argued against it. The month of February will have us seeding ornamentals mostly but trays of tomato seedlings and root stocks as well.

Mike is working on tearing out a cooler that was rotting the floor up next to our farmstand kitchen, and we are going to replace it with an external box outside the farmstand, This and additional repairs to greenhouse and high tunnel doors and gable ends will be ongoing for the far future. I have been taking vegetative cuttings in the greenhouse as well, while Sarah and Anne chase supplies, soil, plants and hardgoods that were purchased or committed in the fall, only to find out that they are unavailable to us now.

We are all going through medical appointments and procedures that somehow pile up for the "off season" while we also try to cram in some off farm vacation time. Zoom meetings seem to flourish with lawyers, accountants, and extension folks (here's a plug for the Tri -State IPM conference annually held. Lots of interesting and valuable info yearly).

I am not sure how an exit from the pandemic will change our farming paradigm, as we look to future shortages of plastic, fertilizer and related seeds and supplies as possibly the new norm. Though not a fan of the ice or extreme cold temps of late, I personally am still embracing the short days and not missing the long hours and commitment demanded of the growing season...which for us will start in earnest by the end of February.

(Argyle, NY) December and early January with extreme cloudiness brought our tunnel greens to very slow regrowth. Then the past couple weeks with frigid temps have continued to keep the greens slow. GH has benches of seedlings ready to go in tunnels when cold breaks a bit. We got our winter crops (lettuce and spinach) planted a week late in fall which is affecting our production this winter. Loading truck with below zero temps Saturday mornings has been a challenge but insulation on the floor and small heaters has made it work.

We have had scattered powdery mildew on Siberian kale (Milstop and Stylet oil controlled it) but all the venting and biological drenches have kept other issues at bay so far. Watching for aphids and hoping we can find lady bugs soon.

Online sales are strong, and we enjoy working w other local farms. Missing the in-person conferences but zoom ones are working ok! We finally have what we think will be good workers lined up for the summer. We are trying to figure out the size we want to be and the direction our farm is heading as we age!

(Little Compton RI) Hallmark of this winter is “interruptions” whether it be Covid related, greenhouse construction missing materials, cold weather, etc. We are trying to keep a core group of employees gainfully employed but it’s difficult to give them three consecutive days without a problem arising. We bought a Clear Span storage barn, set the anchors in cement, and found that the company had bent the pipes wrong by 2” so now we have a cheese souffle building! Luckily the design has multiple cable tensioners, so it is stiff enough to do the job.

Winter markets are doing very well! As in past years, a large greens display makes the sales of the other roots, squashes, onions, etc. much stronger. On the growing front, we have had another invasion of Winter Grain Mites or Red-Legged Mites. This is our third run-in with these critters and finally learning their cycles and biology. They have occurred all three times in 23-year-old greenhouses where we grow crops in the soil. The organic matter is very high, and we have never ‘not’ had either GH tomatoes or winter greens.

It is probably time to build two more 30’x150’ greenhouses to allow resting periods for houses in use for over 20 years. The idea is to take the plastic off and grow a series of purification and soil biology balancing covers over a two-year period. We have certainly made enough income out of these houses to afford this capital-intensive solution. The writing has been on the walls for a while on several fronts besides intractable soil borne pest issues.

Looking forward to the 2022 season, we will just have to see how far we can transfer our increased input costs to our consumers! It won’t be a problem at farmers markets in the city, but at the home farm stand, will have a bigger push back, based on our observation over the years.

SPRING WEBINARS FOR GROWERS. Thursdays, noon-1:00 pm, via Zoom

[Click here](#) for full webinar descriptions. Free and open to all growers and people that work with them. Each session begins with short presentations, followed by open discussion with participants. [Click here to register](#). Register only once to attend any or all webinars. Webinars are recorded and posted to [VVBGA You Tube channel](#). Questions? vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu or (802) 257-7967 x303

February 3. Farm First: Vermont's resource for farmers and their families managing stress. Leanne Porter, Farm First and Valerie Woodhouse, Honey Field Farm.

February 10. Economic value of wild pollinators to blueberry farms: research and grower perspectives with Rachel Gray, Owl’s Head Blueberry Farm and Dr. Taylor Ricketts, UVM.

February 17. Promoting pollinator vigor in cut flower production, Karen Trubitt, True Love Farm and Dr. Lynn Adler, University of Massachusetts.

February 24. Pollinator habitat plantings – what growers are doing, NRCS funding, Dan Pratt, Astarte Farm and Tom Akin, NRCS-Vermont.

Remaining webinars thru April - TBD

NEW BLOG POSTS FROM UVM EXTENSION AG ENGINEERING

Preventing Freezing in Produce Coolers. Occasionally, during longer cold snaps, we receive a lot of questions about storage crops freezing in coolers. This post summarizes some ideas for preventing freezing. <https://go.uvm.edu/frozencoolers>

Root Washers for Produce Farms. There are many ways to wash root crops on produce farms. This guide covers a range of options from smaller farms washing by hand to larger operations with fully automated wash lines. <https://go.uvm.edu/rootwashers>

Floors Design for Vegetable Wash, Pack and Storage Areas. We recently updated this blog post with some new innovative flooring materials and photo examples from other farms. <https://go.uvm.edu/floors>

New Video - DIY Hand Washing Station - Wire Rack Build <https://youtu.be/MLBAIULWPUc>

New Video - Farm visit with Andre Cantelmo of Heron Pond Farm
https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRhtZw1o6RdE4TU1nBB6JJ_FKttg-Zrnt

New Podcast - DIY Hand tools for Efficiency & Ergonomics: EP62
<https://agengpodcast.com/2022/01/10/diy-hand-tools-for-efficiency-ergonomics-ep62/>

New Podcast - Soil Steaming for Weed Control: EP61 with Becky Maden of UVM Extension
<https://agengpodcast.com/2022/01/03/soil-steaming-for-weed-control-ep61/>

PSA GROWER TRAINING MARCH 8 AND 9, 1:00 PM – 5:30 PM

Registration is now open for a [Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training](#) on **March 8 and 9, 2022**. The training will be delivered remotely via Zoom video conference by the University of Vermont Extension Produce Safety Team and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets Produce Program.

This food safety training is designed for fruit and vegetable growers and others interested in learning about on-farm food safety, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule, and Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs). Cost is \$20 (includes course materials and AFDO certificate). [Learn more and register](#) by February 16.

ELDERBERRY GROWER SURVEY

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by two of the authors of the 2016 Elderberry Production Guide published by The University of Vermont. They are reaching out to commercial elderberry producers across New England to ascertain the overall health of the elderberry industry in our region. The anonymous survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. https://umaine.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5u0R6rkbssISwTQ. Questions? tori.jackson@maine.edu or 207.581.8201.