



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – February 15, 2011

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

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Montpelier) Plenty of snow along the north walls of the greenhouses for insulation still. Pulling away the snow on the south side to get the light and heat in. Things are waking up, in particular the spinach. Lettuce has taken a bit of a beating with downy mildew this winter. Minutina appears to have survived so far. I moved it into the front or warmer greenhouse this year. Claytonia will be interesting since a bunch of it started to bolt just at the end of Nov. with the late warmth we had. Trying to get some flats sown with replacement lettuce plugs. I keep telling myself to never plant the premixed mesclun seed, even the DM resistant. Just does not work for me and once again I received confirmation. Both small plantings look terrible. Early season demand continues to increase and so does the number of new customers. Planning on another 30x96 greenhouse this year. Thinking seriously of growing just spinach next year. We'll see. Mache has done well this winter. You just don't get anything out of it until January. Good disease resistance and weight though. Need to get on the ball and get saturated media tests done for the greenhouse soils.

(Burlington) We are still selling root crops and Sauerkraut. We have 3 varieties of carrots. The ones in best condition are the Boleros sweet and very little sprouting or roots hairs. The next are the Sugar Snax though they are starting to grow root hairs. And the worst are the Necoras/Yaya blend. They are getting very hairy with pale green leaf growth. Over all the Boleros and Sugar Snax are still fairly sweet or at least not bitter. With the beets we have 3 varieties also; Detroit Dark Red, Chioggia and Cylindra. The red beets seem solid with no sprouting. The Chioggia are not fairing as well. The roots seem fine but they have several inches of leaf growth. Our Sauer Kraut is holding well, as it should and no one has complained. And the real test...my kids still want to eat it. The hoop houses were still standing last time I checked.

(Starksboro) We've had spinach from our high tunnel every farmers' market and CSA pickup all winter so far. I am marveling at how much winter production has increased statewide in the last 5 years. However I am also mourning the loss of my seemingly endless winter that used to stretch from Thanksgiving to Easter.

(Westminster West) Well, it's starting again! Seeds are coming up in the propagation house, cuttings are rooting under the mister and the heating bill is giving me ulcers! Ok, it's not really that bad and it feels good to be getting back into a routine. We had a nice weekend at the NOFA conference and always come away inspired and ready to try some new things. What a great place to share time with old dear farming friends and make new ones. Been busy digging out greenhouses from amazing amount of snow and placing last minute orders for seed and planting stock and calling on accounts and reminding them that were still here! Hope all of you made it thru the winter and here's to a successful season for all of us.

(Enfield NH) Not much growing yet in the two un-heated greenhouses planted to greens. Starting to thaw with recent "warmth", but no growth yet. Will be starting onion family crops in 3 to 4 weeks. Still mostly planning and considering what changes to make for the 2011 season.

(Shelburne) We are getting flats of kale, chard, escarole, spinach, and lettuce ready to transplant into our hoop house, hopefully in two weeks. We ate the sweetest, most tender kale from the hoop house last week. I wish we had gotten the plastic on before November so the kale, chard, spinach that is in there was 4 times as big—next year. We will be direct seeding next week as well: carrots, beets, salad mix, and spinach. I have never had to shovel around a hoop house, and we have already done it 3 times this year and it needs it again!

(Jericho) Huge demand for local food this winter - gets better every year! We have seen consistent sales at the Burlington Winter Farmers Market. Going to twice per month has increased sales for agricultural vendors. Wholesale markets remain strong, blew through our root crops this winter, now have to save the rest for our Spring CSA which is filling fast. Winter greens in hoop houses starting to take off (arugula, mesclun, spinach). Looking forward to March transplanting. Experimenting with low tunnels this year (Coleman method). Currently have carrots, spinach, onions, mache, arugula, and swiss chard that we seeded in the fall under those tunnels. These are covered with row cover and 4 mil construction plastic over banded 1/2 inch EMT pipe spaced 5 ft apart. Low tunnels holding up well with all the snow this year. Eager to see what the crops look like this spring, though March looks to be a long melt out.

(Salisbury NH) Using cheap mouse traps under small cardboard boxes to catch voles and field mice in the high tunnel, after we had some transplanted broccoli chewed to stubs. With row covers things were hidden and when we took them off we had lots of bare dirt without plants. Might have been because we didn't plant in time, and some crops were just a trial. The radishes (Cheriette) and Hakurei turnips were a test and lasted through late December/early January. The Bulls Blood beets, Tyee spinach, Napoli carrots all sprouted and we were hoping they'd take off with mid-February light. Not sure if the rodents ate the beets and spinach but they're gone, though the carrots are there. Soil looks really dry so we watered a little what's left. Allstar and Wildfire lettuce mixes held up well; planted late and too small to harvest through winter but leaves look nice to begin growth soon. Spectrums Greens mix looked good up until a few weeks ago but leaves look burned; a surprise since a lot of this mix is Brassicas we thought would be hardier. Winter Density lettuce died pretty quickly in December (before we even put row covers on); 7-Green spinach planted on 9/3/10 has held up well.

(Grande Isle) We want to pass along two items that might be helpful on your farm: 1. In the search for a good and long lasting tape to fix any tears in plastic greenhouses, we find the best is something called Green Guard. It is clear with green writing with the company logo on it and it withstands the effects of sun exposure and moisture in a far superior way than the tape that big greenhouse companies sell. It is made for taping sheets of foam together when insulating homes so it can be purchased at building supply places. It is expensive but we feel worth the cost if you can get another year out of your plastic. 2. This one is a bit more wacky! When planting in the greenhouse with seeds that are too small (ie. lots of the flower seeds) for a vacuum seeder, we formally used a plastic hand held seeder but had problems with the buildup of static electricity that caused the seeds to not release sufficiently onto the soilless medium.

Our solution for this problem was to use a clam shell (natural substance with no static electricity) to hold your pile of small seeds and then a pencil lead to drop (push) the seeds individually. With a little practice, you can proceed at a fairly quick clip. The clam shell is key to this process.

JOIN THE VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWERS ASSOCIATION

The \$20 membership level gets you onto the Association's listserv, where plants, machinery, supplies are sought and sold between farmers. Advice is shared (the last report from the field above actually came from the listserv,) and questions can be asked; these get answered by other farmers: where to get farm insurance, who wants to go in on a bulks orders, to what people think of food safety rules. There is (almost) no spam, and the traffic won't wear out your delete button. You get on the listserv with the \$50 membership, too, which also gets you a free book, vegetable and fruit grower magazines, meeting discounts and Agriview, the Agency of Agriculture newsletter. Growers in nearby states and commercial members are welcome. Mail your check with complete contact info to: Doug Johnstone, VVBGA Secretary, P.O. Box 701, Springfield VT 05156. Preferably include this form: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/VV&BGA/Application.html>.

NEW ENGLAND MARKETING CONFERENCE

The Harvest New England Marketing Conference and Trade Show takes place March 1-3 in Sturbridge, MA. This unique marketing conference targets New England growers interested in learning new marketing ideas or fine-tuning strategies for business success. Highlights include Keynote Speaker John Stanley, the Marketing Guru, and a session with farmer and author Ben Hewitt. The conference schedule will allow specific times for attendees to visit the trade show to maximize your exposure. Register online at <https://regonline.activeglobal.com/builder/site/tab3.aspx?EventID=890416>

WINTER HARVEST & SALES SURVEY

Northeast SARE has provided funding for a 3-year research and education project with the goal of expanding winter harvest and sales of vegetable crops in New England. Partners on the project include UMass, UNH, CISA, Seacoast Eat Local, and farmers. Project leaders want input from lots of farmers on what winter growing and sales you are doing now, what you' like to do in the future, and what issues are most important to expand your production, crop storage or sales. It is a 5-10 minute survey that will really help the project, at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/2WYDLPS> Thank you. Becky Sideman, UNH Cooperative Extension.

TOMATO GRAFTING WEBINAR FEBRUARY 22

Join eOrganic for a new webinar on Grafting for Disease Management in Organic Tomato Production by Frank Louws, of N. Carolina State University and Cary Rivard of Kansas State University. The webinar will take place at 2PM Eastern Time. Advance registration is required by going to <http://www.extension.org/article/32969>. In this webinar, you'll learn how tomato grafting can be used to manage diseases in organic open-field and high tunnel systems. The presenters will provide information regarding rootstock selection as well as the grafting procedure itself.

STRAWBERRY WEBINAR SERIES

This series is presented by experts from around the country on selected Fridays at 1 pm from Feb. 18 to March 25. Topics include: Strawberry Physiology, Day Neutral Strawberry Varieties, Growing Systems, Fertility/Fertigation, Diseases, Insect and Mite Management for Day Neutral Strawberries, Brown Marmorated Stinkbug, Fusarium and Charcoal Crown Rots, Viruses, Management of Spotted Wing Drosophila, Nematodes and Root Rots, and Advances in Root Weevil Management. Although geared toward day neutral production it looks useful for all berry growers. Participation is free, but you must register on a first-come-first-served basis for the first 100 participants, see <http://www.nasga.org/>.