



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News –February 19, 2018
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Barnet) We skinned a greenhouse the last week in January and upgraded the end walls to a clear rigid product. It's not a winter project by any means but it went well. We tried not to push too hard this fall to get maintenance projects done on top of harvests. As a result, the fall was less frantic but we have to pick our weather windows carefully this winter. So far it has worked out.

High tunnel spinach is having a normal winter in spite of the cold start to January. We last harvested the first week in January and it should be ready for a second harvest by the first of March. We gave the garlic a lot more space when we dried it this August and it has stored longer with less loss this winter.

(Jericho) Relishing the lengthening days and increasing sunlight intensity. Winter greens are loving it too - putting on good growth this past week and ready to harvest again, which the crew is excited to do. Soil in the unheated hoopouses froze more solid further into the houses this winter than it ever has since we put up the first one in 2005. But spinach, mustards and kales in those houses appear to have overwintered fine. Curious to see how quickly they bolt this spring.

Firing up the greenhouse for the first round of transplants for hoopouse spring greens and early tomatoes and peppers. Fun to work in a t-shirt again. Deep into the budgets and planning for 2018, simplifying the crop list and the work force. Enjoying the last of the calm before the work pace picks up, and otherwise skiing with the kids who are now faster than me down the slope (but not on Nordic skis - yet!)

(Burlington) It is always great when the sun returns and things start to grow again. Winter tunnel crops are starting to perk up. Hoping to avoid spinach downy mildew this year with a cultivar resistant to race 14, which was the presumed strain that wiped out an entire house last year. Baby lettuce is filled with crown rot trouble, which is usual for us in winter, though I feel like we are starting to understand it more. Apparently it's more *Rhizoctonia* than *Botrytis*, and earlier planted crops are more susceptible since they are in the ground while the soil temperature is still high enough to incubate the *Rhizoc*.

Really like our lack of Brassica black rot/*Xanthomonas* in the autumn field and storage; it makes trimming winter cabbage a lot more profitable. We hot water treated a bunch of our Brassica seeds in 2017, but I have to think it was mostly the weather anyway that kept our black rot at bay.

(Dummerston) Tomato seedlings are up under grow lights-another growing season has begun! In the high tunnel there's an explosion of slugs. But otherwise greens are doing well with spinach and mustard greens putting on some growth. The warm temperatures this week will probably put an end to the Asian greens which have been beginning to bolt. I've been trying to experiment to figure out how early I can plant various greens in the high tunnel for spring production but it looks like this year may be earlier than most. I'm looking forward to visiting a couple other farms in the coming weeks to see how others are doing winter and early spring production.

(Plainfield NH) Mostly the calm before the storm. Vacations wrapping up, and posting for job interviews. We did some blueberry pruning during a warm break in January. Seed orders are being broken down, paperwork and training protocols will be reviewed this week. So much more training and documentation is needed now than ever before. It all adds to the cost of business-from the supplies, file folders, and white boards to the time spent organizing and preparing for the actual training.

As far as actual farming, we have been preparing greenhouse mechanicals and our propagation house is demanding about 6-8 hours of attention a day. No cuttings for ornamentals have come in yet, we keep pushing their arrival further back into the spring. We purchased our first batch of grafted beefsteak tomatoes, and they seem happy in their new 4.5 in pots. Things to do in the next couple of weeks besides hiring locals is to try and dial in this year's planting and the crop rotation chart.

(Argyle NY) The longer days and warmer temperatures have been a welcome change for the high tunnels. However, the increased growth and greater ease of putting the rowcovers on and off have been met with spinach crown mite, *Altenaria* on the arugula, and bolting of the Asian greens. Of those three the *Altenaria* was the kicker. Not sure if it came in the fall or it was on the seed. Like all Brassicas we grow, we will now be hot water treating the arugula seed.

The greenhouse is bursting with plants for outside planting in April, and plants to fill high tunnel holes left by the damaging cold temperatures in December. January first we anticipated the damage and planted lettuce and mustards in strip trays to fill in gaps. The past two weeks we have been filling in but we are low in lettuce production right now. Spinach has been substituting for salad material but it's not the same. Slowly, products from the root cellar have been running out as expected. Markets are average but not as good as when we have lettuce.

(Little Compton RI) A few aphids showing up in greens. Bought some lady bugs to fight back. Had edema on some spinach from too many cloudy cool days with row covers. I knew it wasn't downy mildew because when you turn over the leaf it looks perfectly healthy; seems to be growing out of it. A lot more competition at winter markets bringing our numbers down but still worth the effort and connection with patrons is priceless.

Transplanted tatsoi, bok choy etc. is pushing up ready to bolt. Direct-seeded is about two weeks behind. Full house of green kale has been worth every penny of effort. Had to start over as my crew planted our first greenhouse winter planting in the fields! So seeding day one was October 15. Grew them out in 72's and transplanted about Dec. 10; now on our fourth picking. But bolting is not far off.

We found a great diesel mechanic who has taught this 65-year old farmer a trick or two I am embarrassed I didn't know. Like: hydraulic oil is hydroscopic which means it absorbs water, whether you are using the tractor or not. We have two Kubota M6800s and haven't changed the hydraulic oil in two years! He showed me the folly in this. He also showed me that there is a screen-type hydraulic filter at the bottom of the transmission area that should be cleaned every hydraulic oil change. Ours was full of dirt from hooking up quick disconnects for harrows etc.

KNOW YOUR 2018 PRODUCE SAFETY OPTIONS

Three sizes fits all! Regardless of size or markets, in 2018 ALL commercial produce growers in Vermont should be taking steps to address food safety risks in their operations. Below are three 'tiers' of activity, designed to meet the different needs of growers.

Tier 1. Write a Produce Safety Plan. This takes just a few hours, using the CAPS (Community Accreditation for Produce Safety) web site. This is free to all, thanks to funding from the VVBGA and UVM Extension. You can update your plan any time. Go to capsvt.org

Tier 2. Earn CAPS accreditation. Complete your Produce Safety Plan by April 1 and pay the \$100 fee (scholarships available). You'll get feedback on your plan, and access to the CAPS website where you upload common sense items that show your plan was implemented over the growing season, like wash station pictures and your water test results. If completed, you get a CAPS Certificate and e-badge for marketing purposes, good for one year. This is available to VVBGA members only, to join go to:

Tier 3. Get a CAPS-Plus Certificate in addition to CAPS accreditation. Some buyers will approve this as a substitute for a USDA GAPS audit. This is only for growers with a wholesale market that requires a third-party on-farm audit.

For more information or assistance visit <http://capsvt.org> or contact Hans Estrin at hestrin@uvm.edu

NRCS EQUIP SIGN UP DEADLINE

April 20 is the cut-off date to apply for 2018 funds through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. EQIP can help farmers adopt practices like cover crops, nutrient management planning, water source improvements and installation high tunnels. EQIP can help Vermont farmers comply with the Required Ag Practices.

For info call your local NRCS office or go to:

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/vt/home/>

CROP INSURANCE DEADLINE

March 15 is the deadline to purchase Federal crop insurance for most spring-planted crops in Vermont. The program best suited to diversified vegetable and berry growers is probably Whole-Farm Revenue Protection which covers all commodities on the farm under one policy. This insurance plan is tailored for farms with specialty or organic commodities (both crops and livestock), or those marketing to local, regional, or direct markets. It protects against loss of revenue due to unavoidable natural causes. You'll need to contact a private insurance company that offers this program which is 'subsidized' by the government. For more info see:

<https://www.rma.usda.gov/pubs/rme/wfrpfactsheet.pdf>

HEMP GROWER MEETING February 22, 5-7 pm.

Meeting New Demand for Hemp, with Rye Matthews, Middlebury hemp grower and consultant to Vermont Hemp Company. He will describe the evolving markets for locally produced hemp, consumer trends, potentials for growers, and the impact for a regional supply stream. Stonecutter Spirits, 1197 Exchange Street, Middlebury VT. Sponsored by ACORN, \$10 donation.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/meeting-new-demand-for-hemp-a-growers-perspective-tickets-42326073425>

WANT TO TALK ABOUT FSMA WATER RULES?

Check out the Produce Safety Alliance's Water Summit, February 27-28. Remote viewing of the Water Summit or remote participation options are available. This is an opportunity for growers, regulatory personal, industry representatives, educators, and researchers to increase understanding and work collaboratively to develop ideas that support risk reduction related to water. See: <https://producesafetyalliance.cornell.edu/water-summit>

GET HELP WITH COST OF PRODUCTION OR DIRECT MARKETING

NOFA-VT is offering one-on-one technical assistance to growers interested in analyzing their costs of production. This service is structured to be "a la carte" - you can choose to jump into a full cost of production analysis for specific crops or focus on components of that including: cost-benefit analysis for equipment decisions, calculating costs of marketing by channel, gross profit analysis, and/or scale budgets. Direct Marketing technical assistance is also available to farmers who sell into at least one direct market channel. The focus of these services can be on any area related to marketing including, but not limited to: refining or developing marketing plans, analyzing market channel selection, improving branding and messaging, and determining cost of sales by market channel. For more info on these services contact Jen Miller at jen@nofavt.org or 802-434-4122.

TECHNICAL TIP

Andy Chamberlin, UVM Extension Agricultural Engineering Technician, has put together a detailed blog post describing the AZS Rinse Conveyor. Made in PA, it is designed for the small-scale farm that wants to move up from hand washing to something automated that can handle a larger volume of vegetables. See at: <https://blog.uvm.edu/cwcallah/2018/02/17/innovation-in-small-scale-vegetable-washing-equipment/>