



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – February 2, 2023
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<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Hinesburg) More growth than normal on hoophouse greens so far in this mild winter. On the downside, Winter Cut Worms continue to be active on hoophouse spinach.

(Burlington) A mild winter has meant our tunnel crops have done very well to date with lots of high-quality spinach, baby lettuce, kale, and herbs without any heat. The mild temps have allowed us to ventilate regularly, which has kept our humidity lower than many winters. Root crops and cabbages are holding well, but our Waltham butternut is going downhill faster than usual and we are culling a large percentage of our final few bins. Autumn Frost and Tetsukabuto still look very good and seem like they should hold until mid-March.

Still liking the clear skin and good eating quality of our Reba potatoes, new to us in 2022. Just finished our last few heads of broccoli in the walk-in a couple weeks ago, hard to believe we held it that long from a mid-November harvest. Looking back over many years, I think that a drier late summer and autumn improves our long-term storage of roots, squash, and Brassicas more than any other factor except variety selection.

(Guildhall) Potato sales were strong in November and December, but January has been slower. So selling bulk to brokers and re-packers is kicking up, though some hard news on that front. Prices aren't much better this year than in early 2022, despite inflation. And the market for Golds right now is being pretty well dominated by super clean Canadian stuff. Perhaps some knock on result of PEI getting shut out of the USA for most of last year.

Our packing line has been reconfigured as much as it will be this year. Now we're able to strip our C's ahead of the washer and save them for seed, or bypass for unsized washing. The rates on our adjustable-rate loans (i.e. Farm Credit) are getting a little bit ridiculous, and coupled with the persistently high prices of other inputs, less than exciting. On the upside, fertilizer prices may be coming down for the spring. Our local plant Northeast Ag has been sold to Nutrien, not sure if that'll be a good thing.

(Orwell) Winter greens took a bad hit early from winter cutworm, Dipel is supposed to be effective, but didn't seem to put much of a dent in our population, I think we didn't spray often enough and/or late in the day. Lettuces and kale were fine, but spinach and chard quickly because Swiss cheese. We did spend several nights handpicking by headlamp as they fed, which seems to be a reliable but tedious solution.

Overall, 2022 shaped up to be an excellent season from the fun perspective; we had a wonderful group of people working hard on the farm and all the laughter made us feel wealthy. Our crops and sales were good, but inflation and labor costs are a challenge. Looking towards the new season, we are assessing and planning, with the hopes of doing a little better --but making sure we hang onto the joy from last year.

(Ely) Finally got some snow to cover our 1/3 acre of over-wintering field spinach, but it may have been exposed too long to alternating freezing and thawing to make it. Will find out soon enough. Had a good spinach year. Started selling very nice, un-covered, overwinter spinach the last week of April, and sold our last (under wide row covers) through the second week of December. We missed a few days in mid-season but that was my fault and won't happen again.

Spinach germination was an issue in the real hot weather, but the farm is blessed in having New England's Great River, the Connecticut, as an abutting neighbor, so we had all the water we needed. I'm a little embarrassed to admit that when everyone was drying up, we were irrigating pasture for 10 temporary beef cows.

Semi-retirement has made it possible to try out some new ideas: stale seedbed techniques, possible weed control with new and stronger mustard biofumigants, different green manure / cover crop combinations, sequential pollinator plantings, and some low tillage practices. Will be sure to report any findings, good or bad.

Recent attendance at the Eco-Farm Conference in Monterey, CA, as well as at our own excellent VVBGA meeting in Montpelier provided sources of new ideas and new friendships. The vegetable and berry growing business here in Vermont is clearly thriving, despite many unique challenges, and I'm optimistic about the coming season.

(Westminster West) Still working through numbers from last year, but almost every crop we grew had a spectacular year: quality, yields and happy customers. We topped the previous year's sales by a wide margin. Overhead expenses are stubbornly high, and that will be this year's biggest project to lower overhead costs. Margins increased in almost all crops thankfully.

Trying some different ways to understand how each crop performs financially and comparing to each other to better see what crops might be eliminated and which will be expanded. Winter squash, potatoes, tomatoes, garlic, carrots and celery as well as Napa, beets and turnips showed terrific margins but sadly raspberries for us are proving to be a labor sink so will be yanked!

Trying to keep the present equipment as well as labor levels, keeping the same crew for twenty-five plus years has really helped the efficiency and margins and keeps the strains of work to a bare minimum as we all know each other so well. Had to replace a crucial greenhouse furnace this week on top of everything which won't help the numbers.

Loved our VVBGA meeting in the Capital Plaza hotel last month, excited for another season!

(E. Dorset) Perhaps another item for the good of the order might be “Have you read a good farm or Vermont book this winter?” I would encourage folks to take a look at Founding Gardeners by Andrea Wulf. A fun anecdote about a Vermont moose as well as an early trip to Bennington by Thomas Jefferson. Stay toasty.

(Argyle NY) A good measure of sunshine for the past 2 months has kept us in greens in our high tunnels up till now. Lack of help in the early fall and some failed seedings, along with the cloudy weather of late have caught up with us. As we enter February and the days lengthen, hopefully the shortage of salad mix will be short lived and we will be back on track. We introduced to our customers to Napa cabbage salad which we had hoped to take the pressure off the lettuce. Did little but we found out how much people liked Napa cabbage!

We are still spraying for cutworms/ armyworms but new is spinach crown mite (used AzaDirect) and aphids (used MPede) that also liked the warmer sunnier weather and have showed up earlier than ever before. Diseases are at a lull, probably because of the rowcovers coming off and staying off (10 days in January we didn't have to cover!) so frequently. Root crops are holding out fine along with garlic and sweet potatoes. Except for this coming week the winter has been mild which is helpful with the higher fuel prices.

(Plainfield NH) We are puttering along. People are getting some rest and getting their lives back in order, spending time with family vacationing, trying to enjoy some winter activities. All that balance. Finished wholesaling the last of the fall storage crop in early January. Would have like to have had more product and gone a little longer but also were just happy to be done.

An abnormally dry summer stifled root crop production, probably could have devoted more time to irrigating but didn't get it done. Packshed got a nice little cleanup and then we moved our pot filling equipment and soil pallets in with plenty of time to thaw before we get started end of February. Breaking down seed orders and maintaining the stock plant greenhouse and doing a little seeding are really the only other things beside desk work.

In the next couple weeks we will try and assemble a labor force. Have fielded a lot of fellow farmers calls about the H2A program, and we will continue to rely on that to anchor our field crew. See what the local labor force brings in, with fingers crossed.

TIME TO SAMPLE HIGH TUNNEL SOILS

High tunnel soils behave differently than field soils, and tunnel crops have unique nutrient demands. The University of Maine Soil Lab provides a high tunnel soil test that analyzes both reserve and water soluble nutrients and provides nutrient and fertilizer recommendations calibrated for high tunnel crops. Soil sample as you would for a field soil, randomly sampling from 15-20 locations 6-8” deep. Mix well and mail 1 pint of soil immediately to the lab. For more information, contact rebecca.maden@uvm.edu.

SUPPORT FOR REPORTING VERMONT SURFACE WATER WITHDRAWALS

If you irrigate from a river, stream, lake, or natural pond, you likely need to comply with Vermont's surface water bill (Act 143). Thanks to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, we have funding to purchase and install water meters that will track your water use and make reporting easy. Please contact Becky Maden, rebecca.maden@uvm.edu, for more information. Estimates for 2022 surface water use are **due now**. Forms are available here. Contact Ryan Patch at the Agency, Ryan.Patch@vermont.gov, with questions about the regulation or reporting.

FEBRUARY 9 IS DEADLINE TO COMPLETE 2022 AGRICULTURE CENSUS. Please fill out and return the form you received. Data produced by this Census will be used by federal, state, and local decision makers to determine the types of programs and amount of funding allocated to support agriculture. For more information: www.nass.usda.gov/AgCensus

VVBGA 2023 ANNUAL MEETING PRESENTATIONS are now [posted on line](#). When you click on an individual talk title the pdf will open; then click on the slide show icon at the top to scroll through the presentation, one full slide at a time.

PRESENTATIONS AND PROCEEDING FROM NEVFC ARE ON-LINE.

Content from the 3-day 2022 New England Vegetable & Fruit Conference can be viewed at <https://newenglandvfc.org/2022-presentations-and-proceedings/> which included sessions on Sweet Corn, Strawberry, Apples, Cut Flowers, Equipment, Cucurbits, Organic Production, Stone Fruit, Technology, Leafy Greens, Brambles, Cover Crop/No Till, FSMA, Brassicas and Legumes, Specialty Fruit, Mushrooms, Potatoes, Post-Harvest/PFAS, Tomatoes, Blueberry, Winter Growing, Ag Tourism and Marketing, Grapes, Alliums & Roots, High Tunnels, and Improving Farm Business. Wow!

BUSINESS COACHING / BUDGET CLINICS: UVM Extension Business Specialists Betsy Miller, Chris Lindgren and Zac Smith are available to work one-on-one with farm, forest and maple businesses on their finances. Use the time to develop a balance sheet, update financial statements, review a business plan, consider changes to your operation, ask questions and more. To sign up visit: <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/agriculture/agbizcoaching>

“SCRUB” WINTER TWILIGHT ROUNDTABLES. To register for any of these free on-line events go to <http://go.uvm.edu/scrubevents>. Recorded events are on the [SCRUB YouTube playlist](#). To learn more about this USDA NIFA FSOP project and see our extensive collection of pack shed and produce safety resources, visit <http://go.uvm.edu/scrub>.

* **Payback on Purchasing New Wash/Pack Equipment.** February 7, 4:00-5:30 pm. Join experienced growers discussing how they determine when it is worth buying an expensive equipment. Topics include payback on specific equipment like rinse conveyors, as well as the cost/benefit.

* **Workarounds in Washing Greens That You Can't Live Without.** February 21, 4:00-5:30 pm. Greens processing can be a high-stress pinch-point in overall production flow on a farm. Join experienced greens growers to discuss in-the-trenches tricks and produce safety practices, born of necessity, which they now cannot do without!

*** Parent-Farmer-Wash/Pack Manager Strategies to Keep Kids Happy and Produce Safety Risks Low.** February 28, 4-5:30 pm. Join farmer-parents to share challenges and lessons learned from running their businesses while running after their kids. Topics include time management, flow for effectiveness and efficiency, food safety with kids, employee training to help with kids on the farm. Farmers with and without kids are encouraged to attend!

*** NOT Cleaning with Water and Other Things NOT to Do.** March 7, 4:00-5:30 pm. Sometimes no action can save time, increase profitability, AND lower food safety risk. Join experienced growers to discuss benefits and timing of “dry cleaning” and other things NOT to do, or clean, in your wash pack.

*** How to Work with Contractors on Farm Construction Projects.** March 14, 4:00-5:30 pm. Construction of wash, pack and cold storage facilities requires special considerations (drainage, produce safety, pest prevention, lighting, etc.) and technical terms that many contractors are not familiar with. Join this group of experienced growers and the UVM Ag Engineering team to discuss essential terms and tricks for working with contractors.

VVBGA WEDNESDAY LUNCHTIME WEBINARS. Mark your calendars for these free events to be held from noon-1:00 pm beginning February 15 through March. Each week we will feature a topic led by farmer presenters. The first two weeks, February 15 and 22, will be "Crop by Crop Speed Sharing" in which several farmers describe specific growing techniques for their favorite crops. Stay tuned for the full schedule and zoom invitation on the VVBGA listserv.

VITICULTURE AND ENOLOGY SERIES. February 10-12, 9:00 am-4:30 pm. VTC presents a four-part series in collaboration with Northbranch Vineyards. This first class is a three-day session on "Winery designs and equipment considerations" to establish and run a successful winery in cold climate regions, from processing grapes to bottling wine. Register here, under February: <https://cewd.vtc.edu/agriculture-and-food-systems/food-systems-trainings/>

PRODUCE SAFETY ALLIANCE GROWER TRAINING. Feb. 21, 8:00 am-5:00 pm. The Desmond Hotel, Albany, NY. \$65/attendee. All farms are welcome to attend to learn about recommended food safety practices for growing, handling, and storing fresh produce. Course registration fee includes a course manual, lunch, coffee break, and certificate of course completion. To register: <https://enych.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=1742>

EASTERN NY COMMERCIAL FRUIT AND VEGETABLE CONFERENCE. Feb. 22-23. The Desmond Hotel, Albany, NY. member/non-member pre-registration: \$80/\$100 single day, \$140/\$180 two day. Walk-in: \$130 one day and \$230 two days. Two days of sessions on tree fruit, small fruit, grapes, and vegetables, along with a tradeshow and social events. For full program, lodging details, and more, see <https://enych.cce.cornell.edu/event.php?id=1742>