



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – February 23, 2016
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Benson) It's been a good winter for greens production. The December warmth boosted growth and made for more stockpiled January winter greens. We've seemingly moved beyond the extreme cold and toward the longer days we need for renewed growth. Plugs on the heated benches look great and we'll be transplanting next week. Our 52 week per year winter market is strong and growing. Winter sales have even begun to exceed summer sales some weeks. I suspected that would happen as the summer marketplace becomes more crowded and as folks realize that, amazingly, they can have greens every week of the year. It seems to take a year 'round market to do the best job of capturing and holding onto customers. What a great opportunity for local producers to enhance or expand winter production. Looking forward to the 2016 summer season. The conference in NEVFC Manchester and the VVBGA meeting in Fairlee were both exciting and inspiring so I have lots of hope and confidence about the year ahead. Editor's note – if you missed these the meetings the talks are posted at:

<http://www.newenglandvfc.org/> and

<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/VVBGAMeeting2016Presentations.html>

(Westminster West) Walking the muddy and frozen fields today to check out the garlic and other issues, I don't ever remember a snowless February like we have now! I'm thankful for the snow cover we had for a while and wonder if this means an earlier spring? Happy we re-skinned almost all the greenhouses and installed new inflation motor; no more squealing and low pressure! Houses are nice and drum tight now, along with lower fuel prices, happy campers here! Still analyzing last year's numbers, as procrastination is my favorite winter sport, trying to sharpen my focus on profitability and trying to deal with the rising cost of labor. Looking at some new equipment, flammers, cultivators and trying to match those needs against my budget as not to overspend. It was a nice season of winter meetings, seeing all my old friends and fellow travelers on the farming path. We have many trays of seedlings up and transplanted, including tomatoes for grafting both for our use and other growers. Trying new soil germination mixes, including adding Essential Microbes (EM) and Rootshield along with Actinovate in the bulk mixing. Over the years we have reduced soil-borne diseases almost entirely by practicing good sanitation and the use of beneficial bacteria. But I hardly ever use a control to test these out, I should! A few new crops this year, a few new wholesale accounts, otherwise welcoming back the same old crew now and looking to getting back to a daily regime for the next 9 months! Happy spring to both the old familiar faces and all the new ones as well, good luck to us all!

(Jericho) High tunnel yields of winter greens are some of our best ever, and combined with our decreased winter workload from not having to move much snow and remain on a daily basis, we're happy for the mild weather (except those of us that ski). But we are wondering what the insect pressure will be like this spring. Finding ticks on the dog in February makes us think the other insects are likely having an easy time of it too: cucumber beetles, flea beetles, etc. Who knows what's waiting for us in the field margins. With new land acquired we're moving into some long-term field rotations to help build soil and break pest and disease cycles with multi-year perennial cover crops, having found over the years that short-term one season or partial season cover crops just don't do enough for soil building, though they help with soil maintaining.

(Argyle NY) Over the past month here at Pleasant Valley Farm there has been more regrowth in tunnels than we have ever seen in January and production/markets are better than previous two years. We have full supply of all the greens, including salad mix, even doing a little wholesale each week. We cut the first Salanova seedlings on Sept. 1 and for the past three weeks they have wintered well and are supplying nicely while the regular salad mix lettuces are re-growing. The parsley bed has been a success with good weekly demand. Giant Italian and Jewel did well but now we can't get Jewel. Anyone else doing some? Varieties?

We have been doing greenhouse seedlings of arugula, salad mix and mustards since Jan. 15 in strip trays and then transplanting the whole strips to the tunnels where old Asian greens etc. come out. This new system works well and is quicker to produce, though at this time of year go to direct seeding. Spinach has done well with only a little Cladosporium and crown mites, both earlier than normal. Aza-direct cleared out mites and venting/clean up eliminated the Clad. Of the 30 spinach varieties we trialed the best are Reflect, Space, Pigeon, Gazelle and SV3 (Osborne Seed) though others are also good. Watering a bunch in the tunnels, both drip and overhead, and the automatic roll-up curtains are working fine as we have no snow. Quite an interesting winter Mother Nature has given us!

(Little Compton RI) Valentine's weekend was the coldest we have ever seen down these parts: minus 33 with the wind-chill! Double covered low tunnels with an outer layer of perforated clear plastic and even an inch of snow could not save our overwintering broccoli experiment. Even our usual stalwart Forum onion sets with the same cover got burnt back. We had the warmest December on record and the coldest temperature a month and a half later. No doubt we are seeing the tip of the iceberg of climate change. It's looking like farming going forward is going to be dealing with extremes from all sides. Not to mention FSMA and the FDA; they are having meetings around the state and holding them in the state health department. That is not a good omen! Getting geared up for grafting again. Hoping I can remember my mistakes from the last five years.

I now plant Maxifort three days after my scions. They have refined the rootstock seed now. When it first came on the scene its germ was erratic and so you would have to plant it 'before' your scion just to get them to match up! Now the seed is primed and it also has a growth spurt (week three) that can make them suddenly too big to match the scions. We find starting them later helps. The December warmth messed up our staggered production harvest of greens for this time slot so we are all but finished with high tunnel production. Still battling crown mites in spinach. Really like JSS new red bok choy 'Rosie' and we like 'Amara' as well. Customers like the slightly thicker leaf which is rare in a good mustard green. The biggest limiting factor to our winter income now is proper storage. We have used international freezer containers, which are great but not insulated enough for average winter temps so we end up throwing electric heaters in there and that is costly and grossly inefficient! Also, the shipping containers have poor air exchange. So lack of fresh air can give carrots and other items off-flavors. Fuel energy price is tumbling but electricity hasn't moved an inch. Will be interesting if box prices come down for the first time ever.

(Newburyport MA) Two nights at minus twelve degrees with high wind. We haven't seen those conditions since December 1980. We have many new peach and nectarine cultivars that weren't around back then and we're a little concerned about bud damage. The forsythia will be the bellwether in a few weeks. If those buds are damaged then it's likely peaches have been hurt as well. Winter crops have been outstanding in tunnels and minimally heated greenhouses. Next week we'll plant three warm houses with Tango celery, Celebration chard, and Lunchbox peppers, using large transplants seeded on January second. Winter Farmers' Markets pretty slow. I'm thinking early, mild spring this year.

(Durham CT) I haven't felt once like our houses might collapse from too much snow this winter. That already happened to us a few years back, and once is enough! We've got four 30x96 houses that were planted pretty end of October through early December (which is late for us) with Gazelle and Raccoon spinach. Additionally, each house has one or two beds of Claytonia and some kale. The late spinach has slowly been growing and everything looks terrific. Some of the October-planted spinach has been harvested twice. Two more cuts will surely be coming along. Chickweed, of course has been an issue. After harvesting an area I make sure to cut the chickweed down to size in hopes of the next cut of spinach 'winning that race.' We prime the spinach seed by soaking it for 8 hours in water and then drying in gently with little or no heat in the dehydrator. Germination with this method has been awesome; I strongly recommend it for growers who are direct seeding.

Another winter thing that's paid off is to plant lettuce in late November/early December. Normally, lettuce planted in the mid fall has some staying power with colder temperatures. However, below 25 degrees full sized plants have always turned to mush in my experience. With this delayed timing, we're looking at very small lettuce, just beyond the cotyledon stage going

through any cold weather. Once we get past the Persephone Date of January 28 (ten hours of daylight), these baby plants start to take off. Now they've grown up enough for us to harvest small amounts and add some badly needed red color to our winter salad mix. This winter we have also tried growing with no row cover. The jury is still out, but a few things to note. One is that there is little or no danger of disease that is caused by excessive moisture under the covers. I know that one should remove row covers every day to let things dry out, but that didn't always happen. The other advantage of this is that spinach and everything else gets treated to 'tough love' so the plants are ready for anything. At this point, it might be of benefit to cover things now that they've toughened up. I did put row cover on some new arugula that was recently planted. Hopefully there is no need to worry about extreme temperatures now.

UPDATE FROM THE UVM PLANT DIAGNOSTIC CLINIC

Ann Hazelrigg.

Brassicas: I'm seeing severe black rot infections in stored heads of cabbage and potentially in high tunnel kale. In the cabbage you could see very distinctive black veins in the leaves.

http://vegetablemdonline.ppath.cornell.edu/factsheets/Crucifers_BR.htm

<https://ag.umass.edu/fact-sheets/brassicas-black-rot>.

UMass is hot-water treating seeds for growers. Here is the link to submission form:

http://ag.umass.edu/sites/ag.umass.edu/files/hot_water_seed_treatment_liability_waiver.pdf

Spinach: Cladosporium leaf spot diagnosed in high tunnel spinach. The fungus causes small brown distinct leaf spots. Keep foliage dry and well ventilated.

<https://nevegetable.org/crops/disease-control-21>

We have had a few cases of spinach with small translucent globules appearing on the leaves. It can look like damage from crown mites or edema, but is likely a physiological response called guttation. Roots take up moisture at night and it is released through natural openings in the morning. The droplets dry and leave a salt-like residue. Monitoring moisture may help but it can be a common issue in winter production. See page 5 of this fact sheet:

http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/Horticulture_HighTunnels_2012-02pr.pdf

Salanova lettuce: Botrytis crown rot diagnosed. Roots looked great but the crown of the plant was mushy, orange and rotting. <http://ucanr.edu/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=5177>

Initial Pesticide Certification Workshops: We will be having two Initial Certification workshops for pesticide applicators this year, one in Burlington on April 11 and the other in the southern part of the state to be determined. We will go over all the materials in the Core Pesticide manual and then offer the test. If interested, contact sarah.kingsley@uvm.edu to get on the mailing list.

BIO-FUNGICIDE / BIO-STIMULANT SURVEY

The Northwest Crops and Soils team from UVM Extension is preparing for the upcoming season of research trials. They need farmer input to better guide a trial on bio-fungicides and bio-stimulants. A bio-stimulant is a product applied to plants to stimulate natural processes, improve nutrient efficiency, and/or increase stress tolerance. A bio-fungicide is a plant or microbial-based product applied to plants to prevent or treat fungal damage. These products have been becoming more popular and the team would like to evaluate their efficacy in hops and cucurbit crops for downy and powdery mildew. Please take this very brief survey to help shape their research. Thank you! <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/bioapplication>

RECALL AND TRACEABILITY WORKSHOP: March 11, Montpelier VT

Larger produce buyers, such as Whole Foods, are beginning to ask for more detailed recall plans as part of the Produce Traceability Initiative. This day-long workshop will include interactive exercises based on real produce outbreaks, the components and legal aspects of recall plans, discussion of different traceability systems, hands-on exercises to develop your own crisis management plan, and time to write your own recall plan. Thanks to VAAFMM funding, this workshop is FREE and includes meal and a Traceability Manual. Register by Feb. 24 online at: <http://recallandtraceabilitywkshp.eventbrite.com> or by phone: 802-656-5459.

SAVE THE DATE: GAPs CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP – April 5, Barre VT

Are you considering GAPs Certification, or want to learn about writing a GAPs plan? UVM Extension, in collaboration with Cornell Extension, will be offering this in-person GAPs plan writing workshop to help farmers prepare for USDA GAPs certification. You will learn about the science and principles behind Good Agricultural Practices and leave with a draft of your own plan, but you will need to come with a pre-plan template filled out. Please email ginger.nickerson@uvm.edu if you are interested in this workshop so she can send you the template and instructions. Workshop registration details coming soon.