



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – March 15, 2016  
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## REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Westminster West) That the weather is different this year goes without saying! We are burning less than half the fuel we normally would, which is a good thing and I'm sure the savings will disappear into both wage increases which we have implemented and some additional machinery. Not a windfall really, but who's complaining? With the lack of snow, I might be able to get some field work done early, spread lime etc. Hope to spread out tasks that normally get jammed together in the bubble of time called spring. Garlic is up and when the rains stop we will remove the heavy duty row cover from that acre. Early herb and veggie crops in the greenhouse look nice, releasing beneficials really kept the bad bug situation under control. Drenching and spraying plants with protective bacteria also helped reduce, even eliminate, many fungal diseases so our crops look really handsome. Early bookings for starts are well above last year at this point so it looks like another banner year. Most of our staff are returning veterans though we are fielding a good number of applicants for a few positions. Not a lot are looking for full time work; how do people survive without full time work? Truck maintenance, last-minute greenhouse repairs and building a new office are filling out the days. Stay busy, keep moving and have some fun this year!

(Newbury) Over-wintered spinach in our unheated hoop house produced all winter and is starting to re-grow.

(Plainfield NH) Watching the weather forecasts with a fair amount of trepidation. Ground is drying out, the upper Connecticut River is starting to drop, there is no snow pack in the mountains and it's not even St Patrick's day. That is the Trifecta for the start of a dry season and I am hoping that we get adequate rainfall. Michael Smith said "we can grow in a desert, and we can grow in a swamp. The trick is to know which it is going to be." I am laying money on a dry year. I will plow a few acres and think about uncovering garlic and berries in another 10 days if the weather continues to be warm and we get through pruning the blueberries. Maybe get some peas and oats sowed down in front of the fall veg crops. The real business at hand is in the greenhouses with grafting, seeding, potting plants and taking vegetative cuttings.

So far the overwintered ornamental stock does not seem to have any population booms of thrips, which usually start to show up in force this time of year. I have some persistent foxglove aphids, but ladybugs and Aphidoletes seem to be keeping those in check. I am told by one of my suppliers that green and brown lacewings are excellent for aphid control. I would be curious if others have had good luck with them, because I have not, to date. Tomato grafting is going along ok (at least by our low standards) and on time. We always have trouble with the healing process, and it gets trickier later when we do the last grafts for the fall houses. The bright spot is that despite the weather being a harbinger of bad things to come, it is delightful none-the-less to be outside working in. This is the earliest I have ever had next winter's wood supply cut and in the garage.

(Newburyport MA) Our gravel Merrimack soils are dry with soil temps in the upper forties. First peas went in on February 29, the earliest we have ever planted, by a week. Overwintered spinach, cress and bunching onions growing very fast under lightweight remay. Planted first three tomato houses this week with large blooming transplants; cheap oil and warm temps so we are starting these crops at 74F night temps. Hope to have cherry tomatoes by early May, when we can price them at \$6.75 for a heaping half pint. Also planted one house of basil today, in containers, with Albion and Seascape strawberries in 12" baskets hanging overhead, and running night temps at 68F. Will have pansy baskets ready for sale this weekend, and cut daffodils ready in the field. Cut daffodils are a great long term crop for us; big upfront cost but good return over many years with low maintenance. By planting along the outside edge of heated greenhouses and in the field you can harvest from late March until mid-May. Sell well at markets and CSA Members love to cut their own. Season is off to a wonderfully early start; just the opposite of last year. CSA signups have been coming in steadily with some new names. Winter FMs fairly slow. The 'Year Without a Winter'.

(Little Compton RI) Grafting going really well finally! Getting our first recovery chamber properly humidified with two micro-mist humidifiers made a huge difference. Also, keeping the chamber at a modest 72~78 degrees keeps the plants happy and hungry to grow together. Biggest problem is keeping the chamber cool during hot sunny days. We had a gorgeous crop of overwintered English broccoli that got pasted by the sudden drop down to 4 degrees during the Valentine's Day freeze massacre. It even burned our overwintering onions sets right down to the plastic ground cover. I mentioned this to my over wintering guru Brian O'Hara and he suggested we had too much coverage over our low tunnels. Or rather, we should have taken off the row cover and clear plastic during an occasional high 20's night to allow acclimation to winter weather. By giving constant full coverage, we got them too soft. His method requires a lot more daily management. Either that or we need to buy a heavy perennial cloth and just have it 'at the ready' on extremely cold nights. Will make a decision before next winter.

Got a chance to plant peas and carrots two days ago and hoping this rain is enough moisture to get them off to a good start. Just spent a weekend with Hugh Lovell and now am convinced it is better to only add compost as a top dress activity and not to rototill it into the beds. We are also buying a small power harrow for our BCS to do more soil prep in our greenhouses and elsewhere and try to not mess up the delicate balance of the soil food web.

(l'Ange Gardien, Quebec) Harvesting overwintered spinach and lettuce. Mostly alone on the market with fresh greens. Arugula, radishes, beets, other greens and kale are doing fine but not to harvest yet. Experience some tip burn on spinach, not sure I should use calcium fertilizer, keep GH colder or have better irrigation practices. Probably all of these. Always looking to get the maximum crop in my high value GH per square meter, trying seeding arugula and beets together on different rows, trying to keep a nursery row to avoid transplanting shock on certain crops. Maybe try to fit microgreens between two crops, as one has gone to seed and too early for the other.

(Argyle NY) Pleasant Valley Farm. Great yields of greens this winter despite up and down temperatures and some losses of lettuce due to the extreme temperature changes. Two weeks ago we harvested 262 lb of greens for our Saturday markets from our 3 high tunnels (34x144) with a value over \$2000! The harvest included salad mix (2 types), spinach, Asian greens, kale, Swiss chard, and arugula. Parsley has also been reliable every week. We started a new system this winter of replanting open areas in our tunnels as we pull out bolting or older greens that is working great: Starting in January in the greenhouse on our radiant-heated benches, we seeded successive weeks of lettuce mix greens (lettuce, mustards, Asians) and arugula in the strip trays and as soon as they are rooted well (about 3 weeks), we plant the whole strips into the open areas and even in between the Salanova lettuce where there is a 4" space. Now ready to harvest this week. We have also been doing direct seedings for several weeks which are growing well. Markets have been strong, seeds are doing well in our greenhouse with our newer soil mix (Cornell type mix with no compost) and the labor crew is coming together for the new season. Lots of early birds like robins, redwing blackbirds, turkey vultures and even a bunch of turkeys walked across our field yesterday! Irrigation and peas soon?

## COMMUNITY ACCREDITATION FOR PRODUCE SAFETY IS LAUNCHED!

CAPS is a voluntary program for members of the Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association. CAPS helps growers to plan and then document the use of practices that reduce food safety risks. The CAPS advisory board of farmers and service providers has identified 18 practices that are required for accreditation. CAPS uses an on-line platform to help you write a plan for these practices and subsequently to upload evidence that you implemented them.

The evidence is documents and pictures that are in your on-line farm folder, which is then reviewed for completeness by your peers before accreditation is granted and your CAPS "eBadge" and paper certificate are awarded. The accreditation fee for 2016 is \$100, though you can also use CAPS just to develop a food safety plan, without getting accredited, for free if you wish. To become accredited by the end of 2016 you must finalize your produce safety plan by April 1.

CAPS is not a regulatory program nor is it a guarantee of food safety. CAPS is not a substitute for complying with food safety laws, though it can be a part of that compliance. CAPS is simply a system for the VVBGA to establish its own food safety best practices and recognize member farms that apply them. To get started go to <http://capsvt.org/> then create an account and start drafting your produce safety plan. If you currently have a produce safety plan, you can cut-and-paste portions of it into your on-line farm folder, which is shareable, revisable, and renewable. For more information contact [hans.estrin@uvm.edu](mailto:hans.estrin@uvm.edu) or 802 380 2109 (phone or text.)

If you are not yet a member of the VVBGA here is the link to join the association. The fee is \$45 per farm for 2016, go to <http://vvbga2016memberships.eventbrite.com>

#### FARM TRANSFER WEBINARS

Transferring the Farm: Getting Started. Mar 16, 2016, 12 noon to 1 pm. As the first of the series, Bob Parsons, agricultural economist at the University of Vermont, will offer information about how farm families can get started in planning a farm business transfer to the next generation.

The webinar is free of charge and open to the public; register at:  
<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5828597273590682628>

Transferring the Farm: Tools You Can Use. Mar 23, 2016, 12 noon to 1 pm. As the second of a two-part webinar series, Bob Parsons, agricultural economist at the University of Vermont, will describe legal and business tools that farm families can use to effectively transfer the farm from one generation to the next. The webinar is free of charge and open to the public; register early at:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7795227751500403460>

#### GAPS CERTIFICATION WORKSHOP APRIL 5, BARRE, VT

Location: UVM Extension Office, 327 US Route 302, Barre. 8:30 am– 4:00 pm

This workshop will help farmers understand and prepare for GAPs certification. It is being co-taught by UVM Extension Produce Safety Coordinator Ginger Nickerson and Gretchen Wall of Cornell Extension and the Produce Safety Alliance Coordinator. Farmers will leave the workshop with a solid understanding of the science, risks and principles behind Good Agricultural Practices, a draft of a food safety plan in the GAPs Audit format, an understanding

of what happens at a GAPs Audit, and many resources. Registration fee: \$50. Space is limited. There are also two pieces of homework to do to help you get the most out of the workshop. Register here: <https://www.regonline.com/Register/Checkin.aspx?EventID=1804822> or contact Ginger Nickerson at 802-505-8189 or [gnickers@uvm](mailto:gnickers@uvm).

## IS ELDERBERRY CULTIVATION RIGHT FOR YOUR FARM?

Growing numbers of Vermont farmers and homesteaders are considering diversifying into “superfruits” like Elderberry, Aronia and Haskap because of interest in their rich antioxidant profiles and other benefits. That trend led UVM Extension’s Center for Sustainable Agriculture to secure a Working Lands Enterprise Board grant to explore the commercial potential of one of these fruits – elderberry. A preliminary enterprise analysis is now available at:

<http://www.uvm.edu/sustainableagriculture/resources/EldersEnterpriseAnalysisRWilson.pdf>

The production guide and final market and enterprise analyses will be available this fall. If you’re interested in joining the Elderberry Listserv with others who are learning about and trying this crop, send an email to [Cheryl.Herrick@uvm.edu](mailto:Cheryl.Herrick@uvm.edu)

## FERTILIZER FROM URINE – YOUR INPUT NEEDED ON RESEARCH DIRECTION

The Rich Earth Institute is a Brattleboro-based research group that provides farmers with sustainable, low-cost, locally-sourced fertilizer made from sanitized human urine. Keeping urine out of the wastewater stream and recycling it to farms reduces nutrient pollution in rivers, lakes, and groundwater while also reducing the energy and chemical-intensive cost of waste-water treatment. For the last four years, we have been collecting and pasteurizing urine that we then use for field trials growing hay and vegetables. Your responses to a short survey will help us understand how best to serve farmers, and will contribute to cutting-edge research planning. Responses will be confidential and only shared in a grouped format. Please contact us with ANY questions or concerns at [info@RichEarthInstitute.org](mailto:info@RichEarthInstitute.org) or 802-579-1857. If you would prefer a paper survey, please contact us and we’ll send it right out! Here’s the survey link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FarmerInterestSurvey>