



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – March 3, 2015
compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension
(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu
www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Craftsbury) Deep winter continues in the Northeast Kingdom. A heavy blanket of snow covers the hillside berry field, traversed by runways for deer, turkeys and Catamount Trail skiers. We are all anxious to see break in weather cycle of deep nightly freezes and windy, single digit days.

(S. Royalton) We've had a lot more winter damage and disease than other years, and not enough sunny days to flip the covers off in order to water well and let greens air out and dry off. Now that our winter squash is done we converted our warm squash storage room to a sprouting chamber for the Belgian endive roots (Totem from Johnny's) that we grew this summer. I'm not sure yet how profitable they are but they sure attract attention at the winter market and are selling well. Looking forward to some above freezing sunny days to get things growing.

(Plainfield NH) Cold temps and more cold temps. Then snow. Tapping maples has been completed, but no run in sight. Struggling with grafting tomatoes, mostly trouble with a new configuration of 84 tray, and the roots on the Maxfort seem to be taking forever to develop, complicating the normal complications. Opening five ornamental houses this week; not looking forward to finding out that the waterline to the greenhouses under the driveway is frozen until April or beyond. Switching up systems and gearing up for greenhouse season. The pack shed for the vegetables gets cleaned up and turned into a retail hard goods and pottery barn and the shop gets turned into an area to thaw soilless mix and leave the flat filler. Diesel motors struggling with gelling, a first for this late in the winter. The extended cold making every little move take longer.

(Newburyport MA) One house went down, had to slit the poly cover on another. But these houses were built in 1983 and needed upgrading anyway, so this provides the opportunity. Farmers' Markets have done much better this weekend after a very slow month of February. Unheated greenhouses showing little to no regrowth in this cold, dark weather. Greenhouses heated to 34 and 44 degrees really turning out copious amounts of good things to eat: mizuna, spinach, Chinese cabbage, bok choy, broccoli raab, salanova, arugula, leeks, mint, chives, parsley, kales, radishes and plenty of baby greens. Well worth the oil we are burning.

A lot of cold crop field transplants growing already. I want larger transplants going in the ground next month so we can start the marketing season a week or two earlier when consumers really want things. Grafted tomatoes arrive from California next week. We'll move these into four inch pots and put them into heated compost beds in late March. CSA signups running a little late. Good to have February in the rearview mirror.

(Little Compton RI) In the grafting zone again. The toughest part of about grafting is that it is a one month project every year and you have 30 days to remember all the salient details and execute them flawlessly! My biggest leg up came from watching a video series of Cary Rivard at Kansas State Univ. with many great ideas. One of them is to ditch humidity domes and move toward an small recovery chamber that has a kids cool mist humidifier burping out a steady stream moist mist. The domes had uneven moisture levels and didn't allow for cycling in enough fresh air. Our survival rate has doubled with this change in our operation. Second big change we've made is taking the chosen grafted for the day and dipping them in a water bath early in the morning and then putting them in a cool shady spot till the afternoon procedure event. This way they aren't immediately drooping before they leave the cutting table. Third, we graft only after 3 pm or at night. Fourth: don't make your healing chamber too warm! We shoot for 76 degrees. The early booklets on grafting said 85 degrees and 90% humidity. After 13 years I feel this incorrect.

At Farmers' markets sales are great but only because of our greens and that will end next week. We are canceling our April Deep Winter CSA shares and telling members we will forward their funds to the summer CSA. We feel it is better to cut them off than to have their last experience of the farm to be some sad offering at the end.

(Argyle NY) What a long, snowy winter it has been with many nights below zero, but we have had more sun than last winter and more growth of the greens in the 3 unheated tunnels than last year; the ground hasn't frozen at all either. Production has been increasing over the past 2 weeks and we look forward to more as temps rise. We finally went above 32 degrees today! The Salanova lettuce in the centers of the tunnels has done well, but still has gotten some cold damage, mostly on the larger plants and we are thinking an early planting to be harvested off by January 1 then a later planting to be ready in late February/early March might be best if the cold winters continue, though we will be getting a second cut on the early ones soon. Kale has been in full supply all winter, chard did reasonably well, with Asian greens in good production, as well as mustards, arugula and lettuces for salad mix. Our experiment with parsley seemed mostly successful, with the curly (Juwel) doing much better than Italian. We had some spinach crown mites and sprayed with AzaDirect which cleaned them up nicely, and we have been irrigating with overhead and drip for a few weeks in all tunnels. Aphids will likely start soon so we are prepared to buy ladybugs upon first siting of them.

No signs of any diseases this winter and we feel the hot-water treating of seeds has helped a lot with that. We are hot-water treating all our spinach, parsley and Brassicas now for the spring plantings and the greenhouse is getting filled up with lots of seedlings that started in mid-January. Trying to complete an addition for our washing station so hoping the ground thaws for the final cement pour soon.

TECH TIP

Here's a good article on organic greenhouse fertilizers by Dr. Doug Cox, UMass Extension: <http://extension.umass.edu/floriculture/fact-sheets/organic-fertilizers-thoughts-using-liquid-organic-fertilizers-greenhouse-plants>

FREE CROP INSURANCE THROUGH THE FARM SERVICE AGENCY: Deadline 3/16

Under the new Farm Bill special provisions have been made in the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) that allows for crop insurance at no cost to qualifying individuals. Beginning farmers (those with less than ten years of experience), limited resource producers (those who meet certain financial criteria: earnings of less than \$176,800 in each of the two preceding calendar years and household income of roughly \$30,000 or less, this varies by county) and traditionally underserved farmers (women, Hispanics, African Americans, and certain other groups) are eligible for the catastrophic level of coverage without administrative fees. Higher levels of coverage are available at a reduced rate for these groups.

NAP provides insurance protection against losses due to damaging weather, such as drought, freeze, hail, excessive moisture and strong winds. In addition, losses related to other adverse natural occurrences, such as plant disease or insect infestation, may also qualify. Eligible crops include those grown for food, forage, fiber, floriculture and specialty crops, such as maple sap, honey, Christmas trees, and nursery.

NAP coverage levels have been expanded beyond the historical catastrophic (CAT) coverage of 50% of production at 55% of the market price. Coverage is now available up to 65% of production at 100% of the market price; premiums apply. For those not eligible for free CAT coverage, there is a service fee of \$250 per crop or a maximum of \$750 for all crops, per producer per administrative county. The final date to enroll is March 16, 2015. Contact your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office for details or visit FSA Fact Sheets at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/>

PESTICIDE APPLICATOR INITIAL TRAINING

April 9 from 9-4 at Vermont Technical College, Randolph Center, VT.

To become a Certified Private Applicator you need to take and pass the Private CORE Exam administered by the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets. If you use any 'restricted use' pesticides on your farm you must be certified. In addition, you must be certified in order to train your farm employees in Worker Protection Standards (WPS) if you use ANY type of pesticide with WPS requirements on the label (including pesticides approved for organic farms). Most people who employ others to do agricultural work must comply with the WPS, even if only family members work at your farm. (http://agriculture.vermont.gov/pesticide_regulation/WPS)

This program will provide training and review of Vermont Pesticide regulations and the information covered in the Pesticide Applicator Training Manual that is necessary to understand and to pass the VT pesticide certification license exam. The Core exam will be given after this training in the afternoon from 2-4pm. No 'category' exams will be given but can be scheduled with VAA for a later date. Pre-register by March 27; \$20 registration fee. For more information, visit: <http://pss.uvm.edu/pesp/cert.html> or contact Sarah Kingsley-Richards, sarah.kingsley@uvm.edu, (802)656-0475.

MECHANIZATION AND TRACTOR EDUCATION FOR FARMERS

A new UVM Extension program called Ground Work will help aspiring, beginning and established farmers gain knowledge, skills and confidence in selecting, operating and maintaining machinery. This low-cost, flexible program is also designed to help farm apprentices and employees gain basic tractor operation, maintenance and safety skills at the beginning of the 2015 growing season. No up-front fee is required, thanks to grant support from the Northeast Extension Risk Management Education Center and SARE programs. However there will be a sliding scale fee of \$25-\$75 to attend the hands-on workshop. Discounts for multiple people from the same farm. Learn more and register at <http://blog.uvm.edu/groundwk/2015-program/>.