



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – March 3, 2025

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<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE UPDATE

Travis L. Thomason, State Conservationist, NRCS-Vermont

In alignment with White House directives, Secretary Rollins will honor contracts that were already made directly to farmers. Specifically, USDA is releasing funds for contracts under the Environmental Quality Incentive Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

Producers who have existing conservation contracts (general or IRA, CSP or EQIP) should continue moving forward with implementation as originally planned. We have approval to work on and make payments on ALL existing producer's contracts (EQIP, CSP, ACEP, RCPP [both general and IRA]).

Currently, there are no plans to close any Vermont NRCS offices. Vermont NRCS will continue to provide one-on-one, personalized advice and financial assistance and works with producers to help them reach their goals through voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Westminster West) Awakening from the winter slumber seems to get both easier and harder each year! Just getting all the tunnel heating systems working including the heated propagation benches seems to be more trouble this year. The extreme cold burst a few not-drained-well pipes in the propagation house. Lesson one, don't monkey around with epoxy patches; replace burst pipes with new ones! Ok, just had a rodent bite into a rubber heating tube overnight, a spray of hot water into the air is always a fun sight at 6:45am!

Last week's windstorms tore off the plastic from a good-sized house. I think a flying piece of ice started a rip which the wind took advantage of and made off with it, the first time in 45 years for this to happen.

My tunnel garlic project looks great, green and vigorous and will top dress some fertilizer later this week. It will be nice to get an early crop of bulbs for market and black garlic production.

Reviewing last season's results, sales increased in almost every category, some exceeding projections, but our margins decreased, which really hurt profitability. Trying to raise prices in the current environment is tough so looking for all possible cost cutting but after so many years I think we're about as lean as possible. I still feel positive about the coming season!

(Hinesburg) Last week was our first harvest from unheated tunnels since the end of December. Much different than recent years, when we harvested nearly every week. Spinach is unscathed and super sweet. Kale and Claytonia showing some discoloration in places due to the cold. Cress and sorrel seem very happy to have spent the last 8 weeks ignored under 3 layers remay.

Hiring has gone well. Nearly the whole crew is new, but I'm optimistic about the folks who we hired. Have a staggered start of people coming on as the season ramps up. CSA signups seem on par but take more marketing than they used to.

Hard to know how to prepare for the effects of the government chaos. Our plans for an NRCS hoophouse project have been swiped away, and we will sorely miss the CSP and climate smart programs.

(E. Montpelier) Fields currently under 2.5ft of snow. Not much going on, lol.

(Hyde Park) We are having a real winter here at the farm after 2 easy ones, -10° F this morning and still some drifts of thigh-deep snow. We struggle with tunnel doors during the winter months, so I mentally blocked out the tunnels for the month of January. This week with the arrival of warmer temps I'll start flipping houses for late winter/spring greens.

I decided last season that I didn't want to manage greens or push sales through the winter, so I left everything uncovered for the duration, with the exception of last night, and so far, the fall-planted spinach seems fine. I'll know how mature kale fared in a couple weeks, but my hope is that I've been doing too much in the past and I can lean into being lazy from Xmas to February.

Plants in the prop house are slow this year despite having some sun and favorable daily temps; probably a week or two behind. I am also keeping it quite cool at night to cut propane costs.

I feel rested and ready/hopeful about this coming season after making some big market changes offseason. As a result, I hope to have more time with our baby girl and be able to focus on long term soil health and more important things than trying to sell the annoying crops.

(Orwell) We are thrilled to wrap up a pack room project, making the mental shift from carpentry to horticulture.

We decided to do all our own tomato grafting this year, with pretty good success. We stagger root stock and scion planting dates, and graft a few trays every night, which eases both time and space constraints. Learning that slightly larger plants (2 mm stem diameter) seem to survive better in our situation. Also experimented with cutting the tips of scion plants that seemed too big and grafting them to smaller rootstock plants. This seems to be successful so far.

Over the past few years, we've been focused on building a welcoming and inclusive community on our farm –which has meant dedicating resources to infrastructure (outdoor kitchen!) and time (game nights + dance parties!). This year more than ever we are leaning into this aspect of our farm life, feeling grateful for work that keeps our hands busy and our minds open.

(Wilmot, NH) A late start for most, but sowing the first seeds this week: onions plus slower herbs and flowers. As a beginning farm, starting any earlier just feels too risky. Snow in most places is thigh-high, so I hope this recent warm trend will continue for some bare ground to direct seed in April. The plant plug order from Pleasant View is bigger this year to include a few difficult herbs like tarragon, lavender, and true peppermint. Flower basket sales were less enthusiastic in 2024, so slightly decreased that part of the order. Greenhouse eggplant was a hit and planning to grow more; it was 6 feet tall and quite prolific. Expecting a wet summer but fingers crossed for a dry one!

(Claremont NH) Snow continues to be persistent, but crops in high tunnels are growing for a harvest this week. Seeding has started and a cabbage moth made an appearance in the greenhouse. Temperature cycles have finally allowed us to uncover crops for multiple days to let things air out. Geese have started laying eggs. Forest management has been on hold due to constant snow. March is here and with that comes organizing the farm.

(Little Compton RI) Winter markets are great, but dwindling greens from cold weather is lessening our weekly take. One of the biggest new profit centers has been growing 20 different radicchios and then breaking them up and selling multiple leaf mixes in half pound bags for \$6.00! Great shelf life and we harvested our last field production two weeks ago; that survived under double remay and temps that got down to 12 more than twice.

Solar Project and Tractor Replacement up in the air! Unfortunately, the Solar Project was just completed so hoping its payments will only be delayed. All other projects are "let me see the money" before I drop another nickel. This is going to be the end of a lot of things we have taken for granted! Our USDA office was gutted and so the sheer lack of staff will limit future projects.

My \$4,000 pullet order was cut in half and may still be shut down from avian flu problems. Big meat bird operations are panicking down this way. Setting up to be a tough year for all. Especially, young farms trying to climb out of startup debt. I think CSA marketing is gonna come back strong as the Zeitgeist of our world grows darker!

(Argyle NY) February was a month of battling snow and lots of ice, and cold temperatures. The greens production, even with supplemental heat to 27 degrees under the row covers, slowed to a crawl for much of January and February. Coldest winter we have had in a long time. February growth also has been slow, mostly due to lack of sun, but just this past week we have started to see good growth.

We are harvesting arugula, spinach (back to full supply), beautiful full-size bok choy heads, kale, and limited salad mix and Swiss chard. Recently we direct-seeded radishes, arugula, mustards, and have lots of transplants going including trays of salad mixes that we do one cut of in our greenhouse on the radiant heated benches, then the whole tray is direct planted in beds for a few more cuttings after regrowth.

We have been planting oversized onion sets every 2-3 weeks that will form great scallions later this spring, and the first peas have been seeded in the greenhouse (sugar snap) that will be trellised with 3 successions in a high tunnel.

We steamed a few beds in a tunnel to control the weeds, and hope for disease suppression too. We have been irrigating a lot in both low and high tunnels, since most of the winter it was too cold to water much. Bulbs are popping up in the gardens, we have red-winged blackbirds, bluebirds, and even saw 3 eagles. So Spring is coming!

UVM EXTENSION AG ENGINEERING - NEW BLOG POSTS AND PODCASTS

Andy Chamberlin, Agricultural Engineering Technician

Metal Building in a Week: Scaling up at McDonald Farmstand

<https://go.uvm.edu/mcdonaldfarmstand>

A Fork in the Road: Outgrowing the Packshed at Crossroad Farm

<https://go.uvm.edu/crossroadfarm>

30 Years of Farming with Andrew Knafel of Clear Brook Farm: EP26

<https://thefarmersshare.com/2025/02/12/30-years-of-farming-with-andrew-knafel-of-clear-brook-farm-ep26/>

Completely Flooded 3 Times in 2 Seasons | Foote Brook Farm: EP25

<https://thefarmersshare.com/2025/01/03/completely-flooded-3-times-in-2-seasons-foote-brook-farm-ep25/>

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR FARMERS

Julie Callahan, UVM Extension Farmer Engagement Specialist

Vermont Farmers Ecosystem Stewardship Program Payment (CSP-Assist)

Have you applied for the NRCS [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP)? The Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets is offering a one-time payment of \$2,000 to growers applying for CSP. If you sign a CSP contract, you will receive an additional \$7,500 payment. August 23, 2025 is the deadline but funding is first come, first serve - so apply ASAP. It is a one-page application, see <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/CSP-Assist>

Business Builder grant from the USDA Northeast Regional Food Business Center

The Business Builder grant aims to develop and amplify local supply chains by funding post-harvest projects across the Northeast. All the grant information and links to sign up for webinars can be found on [their website](#). Applications for the first round of funding are due April 7, 2025.

Would you like help evaluating what funding opportunities are right for you? Contact Rachel Stievater at rachel.stievater@uvm.edu (with NRCS questions) or Julie Callahan at julie.callahan@uvm.edu (with general funding questions).

VVBGA WINTER GROWER WEBINARS

Wednesdays, noon-1:00 from February 5 - April 30

March 5. What's new for strawberry growers.

March 12. Planning cover crop sequences for pollinators and growers.

March 19. What's new in Colorado potato beetle control.

March 26. Hang onto your soil!

The full line up is at <https://go.uvm.edu/webinars2025>. All webinars are free, but you must pre-register at <https://go.uvm.edu/webinar-registration> to receive the link to join. Webinars will be recorded and posted at <https://www.youtube.com/@vzbga>, or listen on Spotify.

LAST CALL - POLLINATOR PRACTICES SURVEY

Laura Johnson, UVM Extension

Kindly fill out our 5-minute anonymous [survey](#). Your feedback will help inform our work and help us get grants to serve you better.

LAST CALL – REGIONAL HIGH TUNNEL SURVEY

Cheryl Sullivan, UVM

Your responses will help us design research and outreach programs to provide the best resources for improving nutrient and pest management. The [survey](#) should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. We do not collect personal identifying information.