



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – March 8, 2011

Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension

(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu

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

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Rochester) Our berry bushes are still under a deep snow pack, although a day of rain reduced it down. Still, it seems it will be late March at the earliest before we can get started on the blueberries. We begin when the branches have been released from the snow and a ring of mulch is showing around the crown. That generally means about 6 inches of snow on the ground in the alleys and cold knees until the thaw is done. Just waiting now, and putting some sleep in the bank before it's all systems go for 8 months straight.

(Westminster West) The growing season well under way here with deliveries starting in only 2 weeks! Pansies, herbs and veggies growing well and new staff training starting as well. Incredible cold weather has cost us big bucks but I expect it to average out over the course of the season. Spent the weekend seeding about 20,000 onions; won't be buying plants in this year after last season's problems. Last minute seed buying decisions and meeting with buyers, things are fairly hectic but nothing like the craziness soon to be here.

(Montpelier) March 3rd was sunny and 80 F in the greenhouses while 17 F outside. Ten below followed at night, then a weekend with 42 F with rain. All of this back and forth and I still managed to get 100 lbs of spinach harvested this week and off to market. Salad mix components are much slower to come to life this year, still about a week or two away. The difference is 30lbs out of a 4x88 bed or 90lbs out of a 4x88 bed. So I still need to have patience and turn away my wholesale accounts a bit more. Soil tested the greenhouses (saturated media test on each bed individually); that was a revelation about things not being the same. I grow 12 months and am constantly rotating crops into the beds....all bed tests were different and need to be amended individually. Whopping snow storm that just hit deposited 3 feet of wet heavy stuff that had drifted up on the south facing sides of both houses. All the trusses were flexing and bending. Saved both of them but what a panic. Amazing to watch the snow shed from the inside and see all the trusses flex back into position. The 6 foot snow blower I bought this fall just paid for itself in about an hour. Spinach house is loaded and looking great, will start harvesting in full this week; salad mix is a bit longer. Off to move more snow...and get ready for the next mess coming through later this week.

(Argyle NY) Despite the very cold and cloudy December through February, we've had good production in our two 30x144 high tunnels. Feb. 12th was the first market (we do 2 every Saturday) that we ran out of greens before the end. We've been harvesting weekly: spinach, salad mix with Asian Greens, mustards, lettuce, arugula, kale, braising Asian Greens, and Bok Chois with approximately 90-100 pounds per week with no heat and 1 to 3 layers of rowcovers. With all the snow, we finally had to clear it away from the tunnels in mid-February to let sun in. Our lowest temp was 20 below and the temp under the rowcover was 16 F.

We purchased and highly recommend a wireless Davis Instrument Vantage Pro II through www.scientificsales.com for \$385 which allows extra wireless temp/humid transmitters (\$171 each) and we have one in the high tunnel under the rowcover (700+ feet away) that we can monitor at the house; this enables us to know when we can go harvest or take covers off and monitor humidity. In December, we had a fair amount of downy mildew on our disease resistance lettuce varieties; however, a drenching of Actinovate weekly for 3 weeks eliminated it and after renovating, the second cut came on in mid-February. We now grow each lettuce variety separate which is very helpful when one variety doesn't perform as well. Markets are very strong and demand is high for both root cellar items and fresh greens. We are just finishing up on stored leeks, Brussels sprouts and red/green cabbage; we hope to get the winter leeks out from under the snow soon! Going strong still are carrots, potatoes, rutabagas, beets, kohlrabi, celeriac, and radishes, plus winter squash, onions, garlic, and sweet potatoes. We just started dehydrating and grinding seconds of garlic for garlic powder. New seedlings for the tunnel have been transplanted up in the greenhouse, including our favorite Happy Rich miniature broccoli that performed well last year, and it's ready to transplant into the tunnel as we start to take out Asian Greens that are bolting after a long winter of harvest. The first lettuce almost ready to transplant out as well.

(Warren) We have started harvesting 2nd cutting spinach and claytonia out of our high tunnels. Peas, scallions, pearl onions, cilantro and various cooking/salad greens direct seeded last weekend. Alliums, celery, celeriac and parsley up and running in the starter house. Tomatoes are looking good and will be transplanted in 2 weeks. This is our first season growing transplants on a radiant slab and we are very happy with it so far. The house just sips propane and the plants are growing really fast. It's starting to look like most of the fuel savings from that are going into the seemingly constant snow removal.

(Salisbury NH) We really should have gotten the IR anti-condensation greenhouse plastic but the supplier never suggested anything when we placed our order. All winter we've had mostly frosted insides that usually melt on warm days but then refreezes at night. This creates a lot of shading. We will replace the plastic this year. Everything we have in our hoop house is in raised beds. It wastes more space but seems easier to work with. Most of the plants are looking pretty sad. The spinach looks the best but some of the older leaves are papery and dried out but newer ones are coming. We thought plantings that weren't big enough to pick in December would be okay but we lost most of that to rodents. Now some of the spinach is regrowing. This is a test year anyway so we're trying different things. We took off the row covers to see how the plants fared. Not very well. Lots of snowblowing around the hoop house is getting really old. We also don't have any irrigation in the hoop house so now that we've started to water a little it's time to lug water! Soil temperature seems to be hovering around 40 degrees. A few more rodents caught in traps. A simple cardboard box with a few entry and exit holes with a snap-trap underneath works well.

(Shaftsbury) Quite an ice storm Sunday night. We lost a beautiful ornamental birch tree and a lot of limbs, but at least no 24 inches of snow. We are planting onions etc. and are warming up greenhouse soil samples before sending them for a saturated media test. One of the highlights from our winter CSA was the Kossack storage kohlrabi. People went nuts, relatively speaking of course. We are glad we locked in propane cost last fall! Cutting down canes on greenhouse raspberries.

(Granville NY) This winter has been tough: first 30 below zero back in January, then just a cold, snowy winter and recent nights have dipped to zero again. We have burned more propane than in the last 2 years combined. Even with our high tunnels we had to remove snow from the bases to keep them from collapsing and to keep light coming in. Crops in general haven't been growing like they usually do. Mesclun and spinach have been slow; bok choi and Asian green seem the only thing that has kept up. Micromixes in heated house look good, we're still figuring out packaging and sales outlets. Tried planting overwintering onions in the field in minitunnels and also sets in the greenhouses. Now we're waiting on the snow to leave so we can put our Haygrove plastic back up and plant in all the trays of turnips, radishes, lettuce and Asian greens for our May sales. Still have tons of product in the root cellar for April and May sales.

(Little Compton RI) Our markets are still steaming along even though our inventory is running out of gas. Winter squash is out as are onions, sweet potatoes, leeks, Brussels sprouts. Looking toward next year, those five are our best sellers. Eggs are huge too. We brought 200 birds through the winter and they made us serious money; even with the rapid rise in the cost of grain. You have got to keep them in a greenhouse to keep them happy and from feeling too closed in. Getting through Dec.10 through Jan. 31st we found relying on spinach and Asian greens to be the key. The sun's energy, despite layers of row cover, is not conducive to the lettuce group. By Dec 10th we take our last cuttings of lettuce and get them out of there to avoid an influx of gray mold. They return in Mid February and can be cut by March first. Tomato grafting notes: We saw this year a distinct relationship between success of a graft and the health of the rootstock. If the Maxifort roots are wimpy then don't use them because the likelihood of success is considerably diminished. We now over-plant our maxifortes by 10-15% just so we can cull out stragglers and those with wimpy roots. Yes, we waste some plants but it is the cost of doing business. Idea #2: use 2.0mm and above clips (New England Seeds has a nice collection of larger clips); forget about the 1.5mm. We have had overwhelming success grafting more mature plants than younger ones. Putting a fan on them (as they mature) to buff them about will also strengthen the stems; do not be afraid to let them turn a little purple and don't cut too much off the top scion.

(Shelburne) I am sadly reporting that we lost our whole 144x34 hoop house in the most recent storm - the weight of the snow was too much and nearly all the bows collapsed. Not sure how we will salvage anything. I was slated to start harvesting in full, today. Loads of spinach and kale are ready to go. How ironic. Hopefully there are not too many losses! What a storm.