



## **VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWER NEWS – April 1, 2021**

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### **REPORTS FROM THE FIELD**

(Hinesburg) Over wintered greens growing fast. Big population of voles. Cutworms and or army worms were a big problem in the fall, and have begun to be a problem again. Whole crew is back from last season. A dream come true.

(Guildhall) The Connecticut's ice broke 4 days ago, so that's good. Strong sales and strong prices this winter. All to be offset by higher input costs it seems. The USDA / VT Foodbank "Farmers to Families" program treated us very well, they bought quite a bit. We've still got potatoes, but not anywhere near what we had in storage this time last year.

Seed potatoes are coming in 2 weeks, but the 2020 drought has made ordering seed challenging. Prices are up 25%, but more concerning is the shortage. Seed orders we placed in November have been anything but firm, as growers run short, and some growers divert seed into tablestock because of the demand.

We've got a few more acres going into spuds this year which is exciting, and the dairy farm we rotate with is letting us plow up more of their hay ground in anticipation of 2022 crops. Still committed to a 4-year rotation, but it's frustrating not having land enough to plant as many potatoes as we could grow and sell.

(Burlington) Always nice to get a jump on spring tillage and start field work before the season spirals up. Cover crop survival is looking good this winter, probably due to unusually consistent snow cover, but our level of deer grazing damage is clearly increasing year by year. Overall winter tunnel production was good, though outbreaks of spinach downy mildew and Cladosporium put a dent in our spring harvests.

Our successional tunnel arugula crops are some of our nicest in recent years, maybe because we incorporated our nearby field arugula in December and eliminated our arugula downy mildew inoculum. Or maybe it is just the sunshine! Happy to welcome back our research partners this year and continue to advance our knowledge of soil fertility and various maladies. Looking forward to greener fields and abundant harvests in 2021.

(Elmore) Snow is beginning to melt but still deep in some spots--this is the town where sled dog races were for years. Gathering scion wood for grafting our rare and special fruit trees so others can taste the success that we have up here on our zone 3 hill.

Our hardy crew is preparing beds the last two weeks so we can stick many cuttings of our best gooseberries and currants and elderberries which everybody and their grandmother seem to want these days.

Been writing letters to food coops and other organizations expressing my frustration that they are ordering their plants and food from out of state or out of country because it is cheaper. How do they expect any young farmers to grow food or make products if their shelves are so full of product from far away that they have no room for the local ones?

Want to plant cover crops on exposed ground but don't want to waste good seed when it is snowing one day, hot the next, and 15 degrees the day after. Customers from warmer areas want to come pick up their plants but we have to hold them back and say soon, but not yet.

(Westminster) We have 3 greenhouses nearly full with transplants of lettuce, kale, collards, and cabbage, and have started tilling some fields in anticipation of planting. We'll be spreading compost and forming some beds soon. Typically, we start transplanting mid-April.

This year we're planning on growing more root crops and winter squash, as well as cabbage for the fresh market. We'll cut down on the amount of broccoli we grow. No problem selling it, but disease and weather unpredictability make it a tough crop to grow successfully.

This will be the last weekend for our Winter Market, which again had a successful run. People are still leery of shopping amongst large crowds and are happy to buy local. We were able to supply greens from our hoopouses for almost all weekends, so that was helpful.

(Jericho) Hoopouse conversion is in full swing as winter greens give their last hoorah and tomato plants and early spring greens invade. March is keeping us hopping from T-shirts to parkas, mud boots to skis, but we're keeping on schedule for seeding and planting because no matter what, spring will eventually settle in. Crew is happy to be done washing roots and now playing with plants, harvesting greens, and learning new tasks.

This year we finished purchasing all the farmland that we have been leasing over the years, so it's nice to have that security and be done with the work that entailed.

Kind of loving all these zoom workshops, because now I can learn from other growers and virtually visit their farms at the same time I get seeding done in the greenhouse. Or I can watch them late at night instead of reading the news. But we do miss seeing everyone in person!

(Westminster West) It's Showtime here! First plant deliveries begin this week, about a week earlier than last year. New driver, me! Ha-ha, just for this week; hired a regular driver that starts next week. Snow is gone, covers off the garlic field, and the garlic is up and looks really good! Start feeding it early next week. Winter rye greening up nicely. Excited for the season coming.

Getting the tomato and other tunnels fertilized and ready. Putting in a massive new water tank to increase our ability to have water for the greenhouses and fields. Some new equipment arriving soon that hopefully will save time and my back!

(Little Compton RI) Can't believe that last year we opened two weeks ago and didn't stop until Dec 10. This year we have almost no storage crops left and are hard pressed to make a good showing at the local winter market on Saturday. Seems like everyone else in New England is in the same boat. We are going back to our usual opening day of May 25.

Approaching our 40th year farming, we finally hired a great mechanic who is finding all sorts of issues with our tractors. I keep reminding myself it would be five times more stressful if this tractor was out of service in mid-May. Also, with all the shortages when would we get a tractor back if something big broke? Along that line, we are done with cheap BKT Chinese tractor tires. A second one delaminated after only two years. Its brother (on the opposite side of the tractor) is a Goodyear, still alive and pulling its weight after 20 years!

CSA sign-ups are down?! Can't figure that out, but then again our cash sales last year were up 150% so if 2021 is true by half; we have nothing to worry about. Credit cards are king and Square has a gift card we are using for our credit card CSA.

Two farms in our area just had to shut down from Covid among its crew and family. Half our farm is vaccinated, but still it's a constant worry we could be shut down as well.

(Argyle NY) March has been a relatively warm month which has made the growth in our tunnels explode. Keeping up with the demands of watering (because of more sun), harvesting (demand is high), and of course more insects (aphids, and killed my first flea beetle). Greenhouse is almost full and we are slowly filling spots in the tunnels with lettuce head transplants.

Last Thursday put in first seeding outside along with spinach transplants. We are on our way! Overwintered onions look better this year with last year being our only bad year with lots lost over the winter for some unknown reason. We've been doing this technique since 2011.

Online sales, which give us home deliveries and preorder pickups, have been good all winter and we will continue doing this type of sales venue, forgoing farmer's market sales which sustained us for 34 years.

(Ange-Gardien, Quebec) We had a great and very sunny month of March and every crops in the greenhouses really liked it. Colder night too helped control humidity well. I really like winter cereals (winter rye) but it is always a stress for me to see if it will overwinter. Good news, field is green and we are up for a good start. Easy to find a team to work on the farm this year.

Demand is stronger than ever for winter greens and field crops to come. Most of my buyers called me to secure vegetable volumes for the fall already. I won't need to spend much time selling and will concentrate in production which is what farming is all about.

## **GROWER WEBINAR RECORDINGS**

We're half way through the grower-to-grower webinars focused on greenhouse issues: the first was on watering, yesterday focused on beneficial insects, 4/7 is on monitoring systems, and 4/14 is on organic potting mixes. The recordings get posted, along with last month's soil health series, the VVBGA annual meeting, and more at: <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/meetings>

## **GREAT INFO ON SCOUTING AND MONITORING GREENHOUSE PESTS**

Check out the UVM Entomology Lab's web site <https://www.uvm.edu/~entlab/Greenhouse%20IPM/Scouting.html> and the UMass greenhouse and floriculture web site <https://ag.umass.edu/greenhouse-floriculture/fact-sheets/ipm-scouting-decision-making>

## **IMPROVE YOUR PACKSHED BEFORE HARVEST SEASON**

The UVM Extension Produce Safety Team developed a free [video series](#) focused on postharvest upgrades for your farm. Whether your project is organizing a relatively simple outside wash station or building a full packshed from scratch, these videos describe the relevant principles and practices, with examples. View all postharvest resources developed by the UVM Ag Engineering team here: <https://blog.uvm.edu/cwcallah/post-harvest/>

## **COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT GUIDES ARE FREE ON-LINE**

New England Extension personnel maintain the region's Vegetable Management Guide at <https://nevegetable.org/> which contains recommended cultural practices, varieties, nutrient and pest control recommendations for 30 individual crops. The Small Fruit Management Guide is at <https://ag.umass.edu/fruit/ne-small-fruit-management-guide> and contains info for strawberries, blueberries, brambles, currants and gooseberries and grapes. The Tree Fruit Management Guide is at <https://netreefruit.org/>.

## **RESEARCH PROJECT ON FARMERS' MARKET SALES SEEKS GROWERS**

NOFA-VT is conducting research on sales data from fruit and vegetable farms who sell at farmer's markets. Participants in the project will record their sales on Point-of-Sale (POS) software such Square for phones and tablets. Our team will analyze the data and provide the participating farm with: monthly and seasonal reports with analyzed sales data, one-on-one sales strategy consulting sessions at the end of the season based on their data, and feedback on overall sales and pricing benchmarks.

A recorded webinar detailing the project and outlining findings from a similar project done by Cornell is [linked here](#). For more information: Bill Cavanaugh, (802) 434-7154 or [bill@nofavt.org](mailto:bill@nofavt.org). Here is the link to [apply to participate](#).

### **APPLY BY APRIL 23 FOR CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)**

The [CSP Program](#) of USDA NRCS helps private landowners build their business while implementing conservation practices. This year Vermont NRCS is allocating \$300,000 of the total \$1.3 million in CSP funding to organic agriculture and/or organic forestland operations. CSP payments can be earned for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, buffer strips, forest stand improvement, stream habitat improvement, and pollinator and beneficial insect habitat, while maintaining agriculture production. CSP also encourages plantings for carbon sequestration, and soil amendments to improve water quality. Contact your [local USDA service center](#).

### **HIGH TUNNEL, IRRIGATION FUNDING APPLICATIONS DUE MAY 14**

Up to \$200,000 in financial assistance is available through the [Agricultural Management Assistance \(AMA\) program](#) to implement conservation practices such as **high tunnels, micro-irrigation and other specific irrigation and water related practices**. The USDA Risk Management Agency will collaborate with NRCS to distribute these funds using NRCS conservation program contracts. In Vermont, historically underserved groups, such as new and beginning farmers, socially disadvantaged farmers, and veteran farmers are eligible for up to 90% of NRCS payment rates. Contact your [local NRCS field office](#) to apply.

### **NEWSLETTER EVALUATION SUMMARY**

Thanks to all of you that completed the evaluation survey last month! We had 175 responses, or 18% of subscribers, of which 143 were farmers. Of the respondents, by question, 96% said that over the past 3 years they had gained information from the newsletter that they used in their work, and that the information helped improve farm profitability (58%), pest management (82%), marketing (50%), soil health (78%), equipment or infrastructure (63%) and food safety (59%).