



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 1, 2024
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<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Westminster) It was an early spring, and then it wasn't, and then it was... You can't plan on early in this part of the country, but it would be nice to get started on land prep so we're not in a big rush come mid-April.

We're trying to figure out how to mitigate another rainy summer, if we have one (we're due for a dry year!) but few good ideas yet. We do plan to keep lower-lying fields that flooded twice last year in cover crops until later in the season. But every year, it seems, our well-refined planting plan ends up with revisions.

We're relying less on fresh greens and more on storage and root crops this season to even out our marketing and cash flow. And we're working on a crop mix to accommodate a reduced workforce. We can't find enough local help and our over-reliance on H-2A employees is becoming very costly.

Our Winter Market/CSA went well, and we sold a lot of greens from our hoopouses. Now the greenhouses are full of lettuce and kale seedlings aching to get out into the cold frames.

(Burlington) Mild winters are helpful for winter greens growth and happiness, which translates into CSA member happiness as well. Despite a few minor hiccups with spinach and kale germination last fall (surface salinity, perhaps?) overall production has been very good across all crops, and foliar spinach diseases have been minimal to date.

We changed our winter CSA distribution targets and dropped our price after losing many winter storage crops last fall, so it has been especially helpful that the greens have done well. Otherwise, our tables are fairly empty; down to carrots, beets, and potatoes.

Summer CSA signups are nearly on track, slightly behind the COVID frenzy, but fine in the scheme of things. We leaned heavily into our CSA shared risk after the July flood, and I've been wondering how that might affect our 2024 signups, as we were a little shy of capacity for our summer 2012 CSA after Irene. So far I am encouraged, especially since we bumped our share prices up another 5% this year, after an 8% increase the prior year. I think that the continuity of the Winter Share this year, which we cancelled entirely after Irene, may have helped us maintain some enthusiasm. We also put a lot more energy into communications this past summer and fall than I did in 2011, which also may be a factor.

Exciting to see cover crops greening up, and I expect we will be back out for tillage with the tractors in the next several days, picking up where we left off on March 15, our earliest start ever. Hoping for a moderate warm up with consistent snow melt!

(Hyde Park) The field is emerging from snow this week although there is another 5 inches in the forecast. The first spring we were here, we had snow through the first week of May but there has been nothing close to that the last 3 years. My snowboard gear has been taken out of my truck to make room for shuttling supplies around.

The tunnel greens are behind last year despite similar planting dates and healthier plants, which is weird because it seems like we have had more sun. So early sales of late winter planted greens will be a week or two behind, but they look vibrant and healthy. I used the paper pot transplanter a lot this year with success. It helps get a jump on greens production if done correctly and eliminates problems with early season germination and rodents eating seed. I finally nailed the timing of planting with it, so plants don't experience a lot of shock can set them back.

I've been experimenting with "priming" spinach seed before directly sowing very densely; soaking overnight and drying the seed before planting - the jury is still out.

A couple weeks ago I frost seeded the garlic pathways with red clover but then we got a foot of snow, so we'll see how it turns out.

We've had some season propagation house issues due to inefficient and time-consuming systems as our focus has shifted to infant care (and joy!). This has prompted me to consider more automation. It's a good lesson in when to just spend the money and sleep easy.

(Westminster West) Last of the recent snow is finally gone, garlic is well up with little loss, fertilized just before the last snow so that task is done.

The greenhouse is bustling with trays of seedlings, trays of ginger and turmeric on heated propagation benches starting to sprout and root before they go into the tunnel beds to mature. First year for turmeric! Finished up a thousand tomato grafts and we're looking for a 100% success this year!

Proof that winters are getting mild lies in the over-wintered peas and oats which usually winter kill but this year they are still green, and I think ready to start regrow. This is different. Seed potatoes arriving soon and here comes April, let the fun begin!

(Plainfield NH) 30" of snow put a damper on outdoor activities, except for snow removal. That said, we have planted a couple of houses of tomatoes, a house of potatoes (first time for us) and some grafted cukes will go in 10 days or so. I have been occupied with dividing and potting up tropicals and cuttings. Coming to the end of the perennial and annual spring seeding. Anne and the crew are wrapping up bare root perennials potting and are now beginning on pack annuals, and the retail vegetable and herb houses are coming to life.

Seeing some white fly for the first time in many years, very early. It could be weather related. Pockets of aphids are showing up in scented geraniums and I am dousing the Brugmansias with *P. persimilis* to rout the spider mites before it gets hot, and they get tough. Releasing Aphidoletes and Encarsia weekly now along with Cryptolaemus for some mealybug control in stock plants (that have probably been around too long for cuttings). We are happy with the control we are getting with our beneficials program. We have UVM Entomology folks to thank for that.

Plenty of returning workers, although the mean age of our labor force is pretty elderly. Working on getting bodies for the farmstand, otherwise we are in pretty good shape, and paperwork has been approved for our first H2A folks in April.

(Little Compton RI) We have gotten our full normal yearly rainfall and then some in three months! Between rains we managed to get 1/2 acre of plastic down for early lettuce and brassicas. Green sprouting potatoes are in the greenhouses.

Nice to see how the winter greens have grown with finally dialing in the Sioux soil steamer. We didn't get to steam one house and that's the only one we have some leaf spot or Ascomycetes Sclerotinia in. It showed up on Miner's lettuce. Always the first cultivar to go down in a salad mix. Last go around with that one.

Real bad germ on leeks and Talon storage onions! Tomato grafts had rough start. Maybe too much humidity, or too much water the day before grafting? Second grafting came through 95% so attention to detail is the usual problem.

Just finished our second seven-acre, 8-foot deer fence. Hefty price but cost effective in the long run and peace of mind, worth every penny. Lost \$3,000 dollars of new peach trees in 2023 to those long-legged rats! Now every winter/fall veg we can grow is safe.

Trying to fine tune my compost tea skills. Still learning what I should have known 35 years ago!

(Argyle NY) This winter has been a record for how many times we didn't have to row-cover our high tunnels. Growth of all plants has been steady this past month with Bok Choi and kale bolting right on schedule and providing florets, while other plants have lasted longer than usual.

The beds of tunnel strawberries are flowering and forming fruit, earlier than last year, and we are excited to see their production. The arugula we planted back in October finally went by the wayside two weeks ago after multiple cuts and being initially infected with bacterial spot. The first cut was very diseased and slow but subsequent cuts were clear of disease and great. Glad we didn't just rip it out! The next planting in November performed the same, but the Arugula plantings in December and January didn't have bacterial spot at all. We have had few other issues with insects or diseases until now with aphids exploding and downy mildew on the kale. Pill bugs are waking up and could become the same problem as last year.

Our main tasks now are ripping out the old crops in the tunnels and planting spring transplants like head lettuce, scallions, radishes, peas, and new celery. The greenhouse is full and ready to plant outside but now waiting to see what the storms are doing this week. The 20" of snow last

weekend is all gone, and some fields are ready to plant. We are putting up 2 more small tunnels this week to keep on schedule.

Our sales have been steady with our online store all winter and some distribution to NYC monthly. We have a good crew and hope to get a lot of farm projects done this year with barn/shed organization, maintenance, painting barns, etc.

HIGH TUNNEL NEWSLETTER – SECOND ISSUE IS POSTED

[Issue 2](#) of High and Dry: Growing Vegetables in Northern New England High Tunnels contains articles on: New Video Series on Greenhouse and High Tunnel Construction, Time to Sample High Tunnel Soils, Diseases on Late Winter & Spring Tunnel Greens. Prepare a Biocontrol Plan for Aphids in Your High Tunnel Vegetables, and Using Pest Fighting Plants in High Tunnels: Awesome Alyssum.

POLLINATOR SUPPORT REPORT

Laura Johnson, UVM Extension Pollinator Support Specialist

In February 2023, Vermont's Rule for Control of Pesticides went into effect. It includes section 5.04 "Protection of Bees." Here is some information about what this new law means for farm management practices and bees. [FAQs](#), and the [VAAFV rule](#).

Save the dates (Pesticide applicator and Certified Crop Adviser credits pending for both):

Join UVM Extension and the VT Tree Fruit Growers Association for "Spring Orchard Pest and Pollinator Showcases" May 9, Sweetland Farm, Norwich and May 10, UVM Horticultural Farm, S. Burlington. Both are 4:30-7:00 pm.

Join UVM Extension and the VVBGA at a farm twilight meeting highlighting blueberry pollinators, pests, and bush management. May 22, Covered Bridges Berry Farm, Underhill, VT. Time: 4:00-6:00pm.

Questions? Laura.o.johnson@uvm.edu or 802-656-4827

GET PAID TO MANAGE YOUR STRESS

[The Farm First program](#) motto is "Less Stress, More Farming" and to meet this goal they are offering free "Well-Being Check-Ins" with Vermont farmers and farmworkers. As a thank you, they'll send you \$100 in gift cards! Take a moment to complete this [brief well-being screen](#) about your life stress. After completing it, they will reach out to review (for 15 to 45 min. by phone or video) the completed screen and discuss possible resources or coping strategies. Once you complete the screen and check in with a Farm First clinician you will receive a \$50 gift card. Three months later you will be asked to complete a follow-up screen, with no check-in required, unless you want one, and receive a second \$50 gift card. Questions? angelas@investeap.org or (802) 277-5056.

VT PESTICIDE APPLICATOR INITIAL PESTICIDE CERTIFICATION MEETING

April 9, from 9 am-4 pm

In-person at interactive sites in Rutland, Brattleboro, St. Johnsbury, and Burlington. [Register here](#). The fee is \$40; or \$60 after April 1. This is a review of the Northeast CORE Manual and inserts followed by the Vermont Pesticide Applicator CORE Exam for new applicators. This review is for anyone in Vermont who uses, supervises, recommends, or sells pesticides and/or trains Worker Protection Standard pesticide handlers/agricultural workers. This program does not provide recertification credits. CORE manuals and required inserts (pdf downloads) must be obtained in advance at [this site](#). [See this site](#) for more information about these programs, or contact Sarah Kingsley-Richards at (802) 656-0475 or sarah.kingsley@uvm.edu

TECH TIPS FROM [UVM EXTENSION AG ENGINEERING](#)

Andy Chamberlin

Listen to the [latest episode](#) of The Farmer's Share podcast featuring John and Peter of Shenk's Berry Farm and Hillside Cultivator.

VVBGA / UVM EXTENSION WINTER GROWER WEBINARS

Wednesdays, noon-1:00 on Zoom. Free to all. You must [register](#) to get the zoom link for the webinars. Check out recordings of recent, super-informative, webinars on high tunnel cucumbers and cultivation equipment! Here's [the list of all the webinars](#) and recordings. Coming up:
April 3. Gearing up for a season of disease and insect pest management on your farm.
April 10. Tour of the new VVBGA Pick-Your-Own marketing platform.

PRESERVE AND PROTECT YOUR MOST IMPORTANT TOOL: YOU!

April 9, 10, and 11 from noon to 1:30.

Step back, reflect and learn how to better care for our physical and mental health throughout the busy field season. Join this unique, virtual series for woman-identifying farmers and farm employees to connect and learn together on key elements of body mechanics to keep you healthy, safe and productive. Led by and for women farmers, these back-to-back sessions serve up a combination of practical information, movement and connection with other women sharing similar experiences. [Advance registration is required](#). Thanks to grant support, the workshop is offered free of charge to participants. Questions? Beth.Holtzman@uvm.edu

RECENT FACT SHEETS AND REPORTS by yours truly

[Overview of Vermont Horticultural Farms](#)

[Testing for Soil, Plant, Compost and Water Quality](#)

[Census of Agriculture Captures Changes in Vermont agriculture](#)

[Impact and Response to Flooding of Vermont Farms in 2023](#)

[Information and Resources for Highbush Blueberry Growers in Vermont](#)

