



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 10, 2012

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

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Montpelier) This early season weather has its upside as well as downside. Fields are dry and prepped ready to go. Getting some drainage done in the next few weeks that would normally have to wait until later in the summer. On a certain level we are about 5 weeks ahead of schedule due to the warmth and lack of snow. The down side is the heat caused all overwintered crops to bolt and become bitter. So we have replanted or just torn out all 3 houses. At least they will be really ready for the summer crops. Aphids in the spinach were another big problem but with things bolting so fast there was no point in trying to control them. We just tore things out and fed them to the chickens. Market sales remain strong for produce and value added product. CSA sales are way ahead of last year and hoping to double membership; on track for that so far. The push to develop the value added product has been hard and a lot of work but seems to be paying off.

(Wolcott) Had to take fruit cuttings 3 weeks early as currants and gooseberries already opening leaves on our hill. Pear buds nearly open; they look frozen, so I do not expect much of a crop. Never seen it so dry in a Vermont spring. Saw first moose; planted some early vegetables outdoors; none up yet. Planting baby ginger and teenage tumeric in pots for pre-sprouting. Lots of fruit buds this year so it could be a good fruit and nut harvest year.

(Ferrisburgh) With all this nice weather we have five miles of raised beds with irrigation and plastic down. It could rain and we'd still be able to plant once the weather warms again. Green strawberry leaves poking through the straw just waiting for consistent warmer weather before removing. Greenhouse lettuce doing great, planting second crop this week. Other greens are up. Greenhouse tomatoes look fantastic, with second house being planted this week and third house next week.

(Burlington) What a difference a year can make. Last year we were one with Lake Champlain in April. This year we are one with the Sahara. I'm happy about it, though a little concerned about our summer irrigation, given that I've never seen the river this low in the spring. Looking forward to jumping forward a half century from our 1910s Planet Jr. technology to a 1970s Stanhay planter. Trying to stay ahead in the 21st century with our planned cooler, looking at geothermal ground source cooling for energy saving and heat recovery.

(Wolcott) Planting salad green brassicas like mad right now, trying to get them up and outside so they can get some cold before the warm sets in because they won't make much seed if they don't get some cold first. These warm summers we've been having have been hardest on the brassica seed crops, they much prefer cool. We're starting to do a lot of experimenting with overwintering them either outside under row cover or inside unheated tunnels under cover, and so far it looks promising that this is the wave of the future, at least for the hardier of them. If they can survive the winter, even half or 2/3 of them, they flower earlier and often make twice as much seed per plant, sometimes more. Also hoping unheated houses will make it possible to do more biennial crops for seed here. We've had some luck with onions, but not yet with getting them through winter outside. Carrots, beets, broccoli and cabbage should be feasible. If we can work out a way to get reliable seed we can then do selection and improvement in these crops, which is something we've been unable to do so far.

(Westminster West) With the return of more normal April weather, things have slowed down a bit. Spending time repairing and upgrading greenhouse structures before we get into field work. Installing some Hi Hose lines to ease watering and cleaning issues. Set traps to find out if new fields have wire worms. Training new employees, building shelves in trucks and generally getting ready for an intense season. It is insanely dry in the fields, nice for the moment but scary for later. Garlic fields nice and green and growing with no problems.

(Grand Isle) Today the farm feels more like a machine shop than a place full of green growing young plants! Lawn mowers and golf carts are getting annual spring attention with grease, oil, blade sharpening, and spark plug cleaning. Farm signs need sprucing up and sales tables are sanded and waiting for a fresh coat of polyurethane. Our grafted greenhouse tomatoes are just starting to flower but are not quite ready for strings and clips. Rhubarb, garlic, tulips, and sweet williams seem to be in a holding pattern waiting for the temperatures to rise. The row of sage plants made it through the winter without covering. Asparagus is not yet emerged. We have decided to forgo perennial cut flowers and just grow annuals. The weeds won on that score. Cover crops of winter rye and triticale came through the winter fine and are starting to grow.

(Dummerston) I'm happy about this dry early spring weather. I've never before been able to plow my whole field before late June. Carrots, beets, mesclun mix and spinach are seeded in the field. Showers this week may be enough to germinate some seeds. If not, I've found that driving tubs of water around the field in the tractor bucket and watering germinating seeds with watering cans works well in a pinch (when irrigation is not set up yet or not working) and takes less than 10 minutes per 200 foot bed. Seedlings are doing well in the greenhouse. Sales of CSA memberships are slower than last year, but coming along.

(Salisbury NH) Dry as a bone. In the hoophouse, overwintered Swiss chard was too big to survive. Some started to regrow this spring but it looked nasty. Spinach did great, planted mid-September, and have been picking like crazy. Aphids overwintered too and are doing nicely. New items up and growing well: Wildfire and Allstar lettuce mixes, Hakurei turnip, radishes (leaves got a little nipped by the 19 degrees the other night). Scallions growing wonderfully, not affected by the bitter cold. Peas planted outside. We did a test: pre-chitting (wet paper towels and just barely started to send out shoot) versus transplanting a small seedling. We got the transplants in the ground during a warm spell but next night it was 19 degrees with 28 mph winds. The transplants survived but I don't know how. No pre-chitted peas above ground yet, which might be a good thing. Keeping an eye out for the dreaded SWD.

(Argyle NY) With the warmer weather, we have gotten two seedings in the fields of beets, carrots, radishes and herbs with one seeding up nicely. It's been very dry so we had to start up the irrigation system. The strawberries are big and healthy but have been flowering for weeks and we've lost some despite 3 layers of rowcover. We continue to have record busy markets with lots of greens coming out of the tunnels; this week we will harvest lettuce transplants in the field. Peas started in the greenhouse will be ready to transplant soon. Our third Rimol 34x144 High tunnel is going up this week and it will give us the rotation we want. Still looking for more summer workers

(Shelburne) Dry! Can't believe how much I have been able to work the soil outside already. My indoor kale is still producing so much, though bolted early. I am harvesting all the delicious and tender side shoots. Looking forward to more winter greens next year! On to summer crops. New kale is nearly at mature size. Fastest growth ever for Feb. planted kale.

UPCOMING EVENTS see: <http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/meetings/meetlist.html>

April 17 – Heating Greenhouses with Wood Pellets; and more. River Berry Farm, Fairfax.

May 16 - Diversified Vegetable Production and Marketing, Jericho Settlers' Farm.