

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 21, 2009

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Wolcott) Seems just like last year at this time: a long spell of dry, sunny weather that got the fields dried out earlier than we'd expected. The Brassica seed crop plugs are all growing strong and we're thinking to put some of them out in the field already - they can use the freezing nights to make a better seed crop. Last year we tried two broccoli crops and only one made seed, so we're growing that one again - the purple one called Rosalind. Tomatoes and peppers are all planted. The peppers didn't germinate well for some reason - had to replant some. Now on to the melons and watermelons.

(Montpelier) Things are going well so far this year and the early moderate weather is allowing me to get ahead of schedule for a change. Applications of nematodes last August and September in the greenhouses appears to have done an excellent job suppressing early flea beetles and Asian chafer beetle grubs. Found a high population of grubs but in only one 12 foot bed. Some early Downy Mildew in some of the lettuce but this appears to be under control and going away as temperatures warm up. Garlic has popped up and gave it some foliar feed to help it out a bit. Tomatoes are going into the greenhouses and look really good. I am using these things called "Kozy Cotes" also known as "walls of water". So the tomatoes went in on April 3rd with no supplemental heat. The couple of nights with outside temperatures at 17-20 degrees did not bother them. Inside Kozy Cote minimum temperature reading did not go below 42 degrees. Thinking about trialing a small batch next year and planting in early March. Off to scout for woodchucks and trying to figure out what to do about the deer herd.

(Starksboro) Very dry early spring. I got my peas planted by 4/16 which is a personal best. Previously, the earliest was 4/20. I do worry about planting too early, because frequently all you get is poor germination, and only one day earlier harvest for a week or two earlier planting, so it's not worth the headache. I'd like to think we'll get the potatoes mostly planted by the end of April, we'll see. I really feel that all this sunny weather is wasted on March and April and we'll end up paying with a rainy May. However the sunny weather has been nice for the greenhouses, making ventilation easy.

(Craftsbury) A few of you might remember me writing about getting our fields drained last spring. We installed 4 inch drain tile every 30 ft. throughout wetter parts of our land. While it was effective last in last summer's monsoons its true value has been shown this spring. The areas that we drained were ready for tractor travel sooner than our highest, driest land which is considered some of the best drained land in the area. I'd highly recommend this practice at about \$1,100 per acre. We're having a typical April, mud to dust in 3 days. Thankful for sunny days.

(White River Jct.) Harvesting wild leeks and stinging nettles; planting Brassicas in the ground under row cover. Head lettuce in hoopouses will be ready in two weeks. Spread manure, plowed and rototilled the fields. Planted snap peas, raspberry bushes. Bloodroot and Coltsfoot blooming in the woods; tree swallows are back!

(Moretown) Salad Turnips, Radishes and Spinach have all popped out of the soil, under the Agribon. The Garlic is 2 to 3 inches tall. Even with the lack of rain this spring, half of my fields are still too soggy to work. The other half is looking great and workable. The deer have come out in force and I'm foreseeing a long, inevitable challenge with them this season. As a new organic farmer and member of the VVBGA, this is my first report and certainly not my last. I am so honored to be a part of this.

(Dummerston) Beautiful spring weather made for nice field work and great greenhouse growing. Now a little rain for the icing on the cake. So far the best bug and disease free greenhouse season we've experienced. Opened for retail sales April 10 and the first three days broke all previous sales records, mostly on flower sales. What's up with that? As everyone probably knows vegetable seed and plant sales are off the charts and we're beginning to see that move north. Pull that aphid-infested spinach and fill the hoop house with vegetable starts and herbs. We're all gonna be rich!

(Plainfield) Haven't done any field work yet, in spite of how dry it is. Nights continue to be so cold the soil temperature is still too low to plant. Raked some strawberries, but most are still mulched. Plan to finish that project this coming week. Raked straw off of garlic, which was having a hard time coming up through the wet cold straw. Overwintered spinach greenhouse doing well, except some crispy yellow edges. Not a disease I am told, trying to feed and water it away. Greenhouse seedlings looking good. Planting more tomatoes and broccoli now to extend the sales season into mid June. Very busy potting on.

(Westminster West) Somehow we are slipping into another season. Started plowing, ready to set out onions later this week, 40,000 plants, I must be nuts. Garlic well up and vigorous. Early veggie pacs sold out, waiting for next batch to be ready. Greenhouse raspberries coming up quite nice. Weather has been not very nice really. Fuel costs down, labor costs are up. Have a nice spring!

(Plainfield NH) The work, weather, animals and bankers have been the easy problems to deal with this year. Along with the concerns and anxiety about the uncertainties of the H2A program and the myriad of food safety acts and proposed legislation, we found ourselves in the crosshairs of the NH Dept. of Labor. After their unannounced visit in mid-March we were fined \$4000. After the generation and submission of the appropriate and required paperwork the fines were reduced, but it made us feel pretty vulnerable about the evermounting regulatory (current and future) issues that will affect many of us small and mid-sized family farms. We have been so consumed with it that some of us farms (both sides of the river) are considering cooperatively hiring a human resource person to follow, stay ahead of, and help us comply with all this stuff so we can have more time to concentrate on farming. Other than that, things are dry, greenhouses look good and are under control (well...sorta) blueberries pruned, and strawberries uncovered. Spreading manure and some primary tillage underway, ground is dry but expect to get some spinach, greens, peas and carrots in by midweek.

(Granville NY) So far it has been super dry here. We've got our first couple seedlings in and have had to irrigate after each one to germinate them. Strawberries look really good and just started flowering. we've already been harvesting overwintered scallions from an unheated hoop house for a couple weeks now; dollars per square foot look really good on this crop. Garlic is looking good. We put it on Biotelo mulch for the first time this year, hopefully will reduce weed pressure. Tomatoes are in the greenhouse now and heating the ground is really helping, they hit the ground growing. Having problems with

aphids which have been overwintering in our year-round heated greenhouses. Next year we'll going to have to shut down each house for a couple weeks to kill off all the pests. Winter markets are slowing down a little, could be that we don't have quite as much product as we've been ripping greens out to put in summer crops but seems that we just have less people coming through the markets. Tiled another field last fall. It's amazing how that helps with getting on 3 to 4 weeks earlier in the spring.

(Bath, MI) The sunshine and warm temps are really helping things to grow here in Michigan. February planted scallions and carrots are looking good and quickly putting on growth. Romaine lettuce transplants are also growing well. We've been rolling the sides up for the past 3 or 4 days and have even left them up a bit the past few nights. That means we need to get out there and get the automated roll-up motors installed so we aren't running in and out to open and close them. We pulled three beds of fall planted spinach, one of arugula that finally bolted, and are harvesting out the last of the first head lettuce planting to make room for the tomatoes and peppers that will go in on Wednesday or Thursday. This week we are harvesting Swiss chard, cilantro, and head lettuce and mustard greens from fall plantings and hakurei turnips, baby lettuce mix, and kale from spring plantings.

HELP HIGH LEDGE FARM AFTER THE FIRE

As many of you know, High Ledge Farm owned by Paul Betz and Kate Camilletti in Woodbury had a bad fire last Thursday. No one was hurt and they have their immediate needs covered. They have a great organic vegetable farm, CSA and sell some wholesale as well as at the Montpelier Farmers' Market. Tom Stearns and his High Mowings Seeds Co. has set up a website to help coordinate donations, volunteers and where you can leave a note for them. Please check it out and let them know what you can offer so that they can get back to you when they are ready.

www.highmowingseeds.com/paulandkate.html

GAPS TRAINING IN WESTERN MASS

May 6, UMass South Deerfield Research Farm, 1-5 pm

There is a lot of concern about Good Agricultural Practices and the need for many wholesale producers to deal with this issue in the near future. We are looking to organize some trainings in Vermont this season but here is one coming up soon an hour south of the border. Pre-registration deadline: April 27. See: www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/meetings/Good%20Agricultural%20Practices%205-6-09.pdf

RICE GROWING WORKSHOPS

Sunday May 17 & Sunday September 13, Putney VT

Takeshi & Linda Akaogi have been experimenting with growing rice at their farm in southeastern Vermont. This workshop is a two-part series workshop as a part of their Northeast SARE Farmer Grant. They are seeking growers who will do the following: Attend both the spring and fall workshops and learn basic rice growing; Grow the rice variety "Hayayuki" in a 5-gallon container at their location (we supply seedlings at the spring workshop); Record the crop's progress on the observation record sheet and send to Akaogi Farm in October. There is no charge but pre-registration is due May 5. For details see: www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/meetings/riceworkshops09.pdf