



**Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 4, 2023**  
Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension  
(802) 656-7534, [vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu](mailto:vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu)  
<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

## **REPORTS FROM THE FIELD**

(Burlington) It is nice to see spring arriving. Cover crop survival looks good, though a lot of grazing damage from deer in some places. I'm interested to see how our multiple clover blends overwinter and when they bloom. Also comparing our home-grown VNS vetch to an earlier-flowering variety "Purple Bounty," curious to see if we'll have earlier N accumulation and flowers for pollinators.

CSA sales are brisk, nearly finished for our summer shares. Winter wholesale has been good, and nice to be adding some spinach and greens to our sales list. We avoided downy mildew and severe Cladosporium in our winter spinach this year but are having a lot more lettuce crown rot than in recent years. It seems strongly correlated with warmer autumns and winters. We may try pre-plant biofumigation with mustards to see whether that helps our winter lettuce die-off.

We skated through the past several years with negligible spring flooding, but the snowpack this year seems unlikely to let us off so easily. I hope it happens in the next couple of weeks instead of May or later.

(Westminster) The season should be off to a good start. Our greenhouses are full of transplants that need to get out in the field as soon as it gets dry, mid-April we hope. We're growing the same mix of crops with a few new varieties, including a new early sweet corn, Kickoff XR. We'll also be planting four new types of lacinata kale, hedging our bets in case they all don't turn out as expected.

We're still packing out a few storage crops. Beets have held up well and we have purple daikon still, but everything else is gone. We'll be planting field peas and oats as soon as possible on fields scheduled for later crops, such as third planting kale. That will make good green manure and means we'll have to spread less compost.

Our H-2A workers will be arriving from Jamaica around May 1, and we're looking forward to them. The adverse effect wage rate (the minimum wage H-2A employers must pay all workers, H-2A and local) will be going up by \$1.29 an hour this year, so we'll be screening potential local employees very closely.

(Guildhall) Snow and frost persist, making soil samples impossible. Potato sales are picking up and hopefully we'll get the last 250k lbs. sold this month. Also this month we're hauling seed in from all over, and a fair amount of new-to-us equipment.

Mid-March I was able to attend the PotatoesUSA annual board meeting in Denver. Really cool to meet so many growers, most of them from out west. I was certainly the smallest farmer there, but I asked a lot of questions and had a real good time.

(Hyde Park) It's getting muddy here and parts of the field are slowly emerging from snow this week. I'm starting the greenhouse in earnest this week after some experiments with small, electric heated spaces under lights - greenhouses in the greenhouse. The overwintered greens are starting to put on some real growth and some are bolting as usual. Chickweed is getting fiercer every year mostly because I get lazy during the winter months. I know it will start to become a significant issue if laziness persists, which it undoubtedly will.

Paper pot greens look super healthy but paper pot kale plants, an experiment this spring, are pretty stagnant. Maybe I planted too quickly after fertilizing and burned some roots but I'm not getting the early season growth I'd like. I think they'll bounce in the next week or so.

I'm finishing various construction projects and starting new ones before the onslaught begins. I just love this time of year, so much hope, excitement, warmth, and sunshine. Full of uncrushed dreams.

(Orwell) Winter greens are still going strong even as the snow melts quickly with spring rains. We lost a cover on a house in heavy wind a few days ago, and some beautiful looking spinach got damaged on the edges of leaves, probably because it was just too tender. This time of year drainage becomes a problem on our farm, the heavy clay soils still partially frozen and everything is a slippery mucky mess. Lots of our time spent just trying to keep the cows in dry areas and roads from getting too rutted.

Inside the tunnels, we are keeping a more careful eye on aphid populations after realizing last year that potato aphids are a big problem if they carry over to tomatoes. Plants are growing strong and we are excited to try some new varieties this year. Already feeling behind but excited for the fresh start a new season brings with it.

(Westminster West) Three weeks ago we had 24 inches of fresh snow on the fields, now it's gone and our garlic is up and looking excellent! Our focus is on getting the tunnels ready for planting an assortment of crops including potatoes for the first time. Bedding plants and herb production are moving along with first wholesale deliveries only ten days away! Staff seems very happy to be back as I am to have them back.

Trying something different this year, we signed a lease with a small chicken and egg business to operate his flock on a bunch of acres that was only producing hay. Free range 600 layers plus 1,200 meat birds should add to the fertility after their 3-year stay, with better returns than the hay operation which basically paid us nothing. Win-win for helping out a startup farmer!

(Plainfield NH) As my Ma used to say "Spring has sprung..." Although it's only early April, the temp has only gotten to over 50 a couple of times. The ornamental greenhouses are filling up with hangers and flats and with the sunlight the growth of the plants is kicking in.

This time of year it often seems you can do no wrong, but we are dealing pests already. The biological control budget will likely be high this year. Some expensive overwintered tropicals we purchased last spring came in with mealybugs, and they spread undetected in the late summer and fall. We threw out over seventy 1/2 gallon rosemary plants and some pricey ornamentals. We are using *Cryptolaemus* and this year I have actually seen them at work, which is encouraging. After an early onset of aphids on begonias in January I applied *Aphidius* which worked remarkably well in the dead of winter, so we now have pretty good control. A few WF showed up early but *Delphastus* dumped on the cutting trays have kept them at a low level and I am now using a prophylactic application of *Encarsia formosa*.

A good crew is back in the greenhouse, but the workforce around here is definitely aging in place, There are more locals applying for work than in the past couple of years, but hard to patch together a full time crew with folks whom apply for only 20 to 25 hours a week and want a couple of weeks off in the summer, but that seems to be our reality. I don't think we have had a person apply for a 40 hour a week job in 5 years.

I am reminded that field tillage and planting season is just around the corner because our 92 year old plowman is getting itchy feet as the ground turns from white to brown and has been calling me to know when he needs to show up. Our first H2A crew members hopefully arrive in two weeks, and we can get a boost in the greenhouses, with spring chores, and maybe some blueberry pruning.

(Salisbury NH) Planted peas in the hoop house. After waiting a long time for them to germinate I started to dig in the row to see if the seed had sprouted. Dug quite a ways down the row before I even found a pea. Darn rodents! Replanted today. Snow is still hanging on but I can at least get to the hoop houses. Radishes, beets, and chard are up. I heated hoop houses. Trying some new varieties of lettuces. Also couldn't get El Diablo Brussels Sprouts so trying a couple new things. Had cilantro overwinter. Spinach did too and has finally put on growth that looks appealing to eat. Lots of vegetable starts in the house waiting for transplant up to bigger pots or into hoop house on overcast day with warmer stretch predicted. Another few weeks and things kick into high gear.

(Argyle NY) We transplanted our first sugar snap peas in the high tunnel and have the second group ready to go. This system is more productive and earlier than outside. 2 rows planted on a bed with a Hortinova fence in between. Also in the high tunnels our overwintered spinach, Swiss chard, and kale are loving the warm and long days. The scallions which we now grow from oversized onion sets are almost ready, with successive plantings every other week.

This week we will be transplanting outdoors: spinach, chard, and lettuce along with the usual seeded crops. Arugula with the usual bacterial spot is the only disease so far. Aphids are minimal with only the ever-present soil gnats in the greenhouse lurking in the background.

Sales have been steady with our online store and we have a good crew but always can use another good, fast-handed and motivated worker!

## UVM EXTENSION POLLINATOR SUPPORT PROGRAM UPDATES

Laura Johnson, Pollinator Support Specialist

UVM Extension and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies have published “Know Your 5” pollinator guides for apples, brambles and strawberries (with other crops coming soon) as part of a newly formed Vermont Pollination Working Group. See <https://vtcostudies.org/know-your-5/>. The guides describe important pollinators for, and supported by, commonly grown commercial crops in Vermont. If you’d like copies to provide to your customers, contact Laura or Spencer at [laura.o.johnson@uvm.edu](mailto:laura.o.johnson@uvm.edu) or [shardy@vtcostudies.org](mailto:shardy@vtcostudies.org).

Save the dates for two on farm pollinator workshops:

May 10 from 4:30 to 6:30 pm. *Pollination and Pollinator Monitoring in Apple Orchards* at the UVM Horticulture Research and Education Center and Catamount Educational Farm 65 Green Mountain Drive, South Burlington, VT 05403

May 23 from 5:00 to 7:00 pm. *Pollinator Monitoring and Habitat to Support Pollinators and Reduce Pests on Blueberry Farms*. Cedar Circle Farm and Education Center, 225 Pavilion Rd., East Thetford VT 05043.

## UVM EXTENSION AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING UPDATES

Chris Callahan and Andy Chamberlin

### New blog posts:

*Managing Humidity and Condensation in Coolers* - <http://go.uvm.edu/humidity>. Some crops like cold temperatures and high humidity, some crops prefer it drier. How do you manage this, and how do you avoid condensation from rotting your cooler, or worse your barn? This blog post goes into the scientific details, and key points to managing the conditions you need and not the issues you don’t.

*Working with Contractors on a Postharvest Project* - <http://go.uvm.edu/contractors>. Construction projects are both exciting and daunting. There’s great joy in dreaming about a new space or a renovated work area, but there can be a long windy path full of dread and stress between what you have now and what you hope to have in the future. Working with a contractor partner can ease this path, but it can also add stress and unexpected twists and turns. We’ve compiled a list of helpful considerations below for you to explore as you think about a farm construction project. These are based on informal interviews with lots of farms we have worked with including some who have shared their learning through postharvest case studies.

*A Three-Season Structure Keeps the Momentum at Flywheel Farm*. <https://go.uvm.edu/flywheel>. Wash/pack spaces don’t need to cost 5 figures and in this post harvest case study we outline how Flywheel Farm use familiar construction techniques to build a structure that’s both affordable and practical.

**New podcast** *Brookdale Farm Supplies: A Tour with Trevor Hardy*. <https://thefarmersshare.com>  
This episode comes to you from Hollis New Hampshire, where we visit with Trevor Hardy of Brookdale Fruit Farm and get a tour of his farm supplies business. This conversation takes you on a walking tour with Andy Chamberlin, Chris Callahan and Hans Estrin as we visit with Trevor and see what equipment he's got in his buildings and what new technology he's bringing into the states.

**SCRUB webinars.** The *Sanitizing and Cleaning Resources for Your Business* team has hosted a series of Grower Roundtables and they are all posted on YouTube, links are at <https://go.uvm.edu/scrubevents>. Topics include:

- Honing Your Management Style to Recruit and Retain a Lean and Clean Farm Crew
- Payback on Purchasing New Wash/Pack Equipment
- Workarounds in Washing Greens That You Can't Live Without
- What NOT to Do to Save Time in the Pack shed
- How to Talk to Contractors About Your Farm Building Construction Project.

**Past blog posts of seasonal relevance:**

- Starting-up Heaters without Getting Burned – Greenhouse and High Tunnel Heater Safety Checks. <https://go.uvm.edu/heatersafety>
- Getting Started with a Growth Chamber, <https://go.uvm.edu/germchambers>
- Ventilation in Greenhouses and High Tunnels. <http://go.uvm.edu/tunnelventilation>
- Farmer's Favorites: Cleaning Tools. <https://go.uvm.edu/ffcleaningtools>
- Heated Greenhouse Benches at Blue Star Farm. <https://thefarmersshare.com/2022/06/20/heated-greenhouse-benches-at-blue-star-farm-ep75/>

**SAVE THE DATE**

**July 21. Northeast Mechanical Weed Control Field Day.** Hall Brook Farm. Thorndike, ME. This event will focus on knowledge exchange between farmers, researchers, and equipment retailers, featuring: • Tool demonstrations scaled for small to large vegetable and field crop production • Hand tools, walk-behind tractors, tool carriers, and tractor-mounted equipment. • Presentations and panel discussions from farmers and researchers. Cost: \$30 includes refreshments and lunch. Stay tuned for registration information.