



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – April 5, 2016
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Huntington) Winter rye started greening up March 29, giving me hope that we'll get something of an N contribution this year from the hairy vetch we drilled with our early rye seedings. Plasticulture garlic grew more this past fall than we've ever seen, and with recent growth we have many 3-hinc shoots. We normally have no fall shoot growth, and don't see any emergence until April. With temps in the low teens forecast for the next few days it appears we'll be doing some hardiness testing. On a related topic, that planting is on a sloped field, so had an annual ryegrass/oat cover crop sown in the wheel tracks; both reliably winterkill at our farm. We had great growth in the fall, and the oats did as they were told, but the annual ryegrass emerged from winter with just some tip burn. Oops. Storage crop sales were good this winter, though local wholesale growth as leveled off quite a bit, so we're taking on a few new accounts. Looking ahead, I'm grateful that we have an excellent crew lined up for this year.

(Williston) Spinach is looking great in hoophouse and ready to cut again for third time. Kale is rebounding back from last harvest as well. I was able to do some watering the last warm spell which helped with regrowth. Catching a few voles/shrew/mice in hoophouse with snap traps but not much damage. Rabbits did more damage to kale earlier in season. Garlic is just up above the straw mulch which should not be a problem with the upcoming cold snap. The weather is sure like a roller coaster this year. Did not have to use my new snow blower at all this year to keep hoophouse cleared and I am convinced that is why it did not snow this year!

(Grand Isle) We started the morning at 13 degrees. A killdeer who made it up early looked very cold. We have excellent control of voles in greenhouses this spring, due we think to the fact that we set traps in unused houses throughout the winter months. We made a bunch of the Elliot Coleman rodent boxes which are wonderful because you don't lose your traps and rarely need bait. We regret the lack of snow on the strawberry plants and just hope the straw saved the majority of the plants. Our garlic, chives, and tulips are valiantly poking forth despite this cold snap. We have installed two root zone heating systems and love all the information and diagrams we found through Extension website; 'Root Zone heating systems for greenhouses' the URL is <http://articles.extension.org/pages/59546/root-zone-heating-systems-for-greenhouses>

(Elmore) Ice and 2 inches of snow every other day and then hot; how do you put plants outside with weather like this? Making lots of cuttings of our best fruiting shrubs and grafted 400 apple trees this week, in the comfort of our high tunnel. Replanted all our vegetable beds inside the greenhouse. It looks like bud survival on fruit trees and berry plants is very good, just hope it will not be too dry for everything this spring and summer due to lack of snow for water reserves deep underground.

(Burlington) Indoor spinach is going nuts with growth; outdoor kale overwintered nicely in low tunnels, and things are generally looking well for spring. I almost un-mulched the strawberries last week, and then opted to keep them covered with mid-teen overnights on the way. Invested in some new single-bed width mowing, seeding, flaming and finishing technology to help us achieve better bed prep, weed control, and cover cropping. Ah, the promise of a new season. Anybody have a great way to deal with winter wash water on flat ground?

(Newbury) Garlic is up. Peas and favas planted. Pussy willows a month early this year over last.

(Newburyport MA) All stone-fruit buds completely winterkilled back on February 14. Apple buds with quarter inch green very much in trouble during this current cold spell. Not sure about brambles yet. Strawberries still covered look good. Thinking about growing more Seascap strawberries in containers and more melons for the CSA Fruit Share to offset tree fruit losses. Greenhouse tomatoes setting fifth fruit cluster with plenty of wind for pollination the whole month of March. Should start cherry tomato harvest the end of this month. Burning a lot of oil though. Harvesting nice spinach and carrots that overwintered under row cover in the field. Overwintered evergreen bunching onions look great in the field, with no cover. Field transplants all ahead of schedule in the greenhouses. Farmers' Market sales and CSA Share signups picking up a bit. Nice pansy plants ready to sell but still too cold. Herbs and daffodils selling well at FMs. Hoping for milder, more settled weather for the last half of April.

(Little Compton RI) A few of us Northeast farmers just returned from an incredible SARE 3-day cover Ccrop event in Baltimore, MD. It was the most artful blend of science, practice and technology I have ever experienced. The top soil scientists at the USDA's Beltsville, MD ag research service have made great strides in their understanding of no-till practices. They have over a hundred acres of plots showing both organic and conventional systems utilizing no-till theories. Since the better part of the US acreage is devoted to grains, corn or soybean the vegetable component of the lectures was limited, but the focus of the event was the growing scientific data showing how important cover crops can be--especially when used in a no-till cropping system. On the vegetable side they had a piece of equipment called an 'overseeder' which is an extra-tall grain drill that seeds mixed species of grains and clovers in between crops like corn, cabbage, bean, etc.

The idea is that the cash crop gets a head start and the cover crop is introduced late enough so it doesn't interfere. When the main crop is removed or senesces the cover crop has such a good root system that it flourishes. The event was videotaped so it should be viewable soon; check for it at www.sare.org. Meantime there is a great no-till video from a German grower showing other practical ideas for vegetable growers of any size operation:

<http://articles.extension.org/pages/71822/rotational-no-till-and-mulching-systems-for-organic-vegetable-farms-webinar>.

(Plainfield NH) We are slowly making our way towards spring, proceeding outdoors with caution. Pruning blueberries, spreading some wood ash and dealing with brush have been the only major outdoor activities; our energies are focused on the ornamental and vegetable production greenhouses. Due to the cold this week I will delay mulch removal on berries, rhubarb and strawberries. It would be nice to have this time for strawberry regenerative growth, but early mulch removal risks early flowering, which is hugely expensive and an energy drain should there be many nights of frost control. I got to attend a cover crop conference as part of a NH delegation down in Baltimore this past week. It was hugely interesting and more relevant than ever because of the impending nutrient management issues. I firmly believe that nutrient management and documentation for the feds will be the next FSMA-like issue we face, so it was great to see all the research and results on soil health issues. Also saw some Yankee ingenuity in terms of farmers modifying their no till strategies and machinery. I had the pleasure to meet Heather Darby from your fair state, and she will prove to be hugely influential in how all of us in this region will be practicing managing our cropping strategies in the future.

(Argyle NY) Pleasant Valley Farm. The weather has allowed us to do lots of transplanting in the high and low tunnels, replanting greens, scallions, etc. We are direct seeding radishes, arugula, spinach, and herbs. Our greens production this winter has been the most prolific and consistent in years, despite the up and down temperature swings. We have had trouble with aphids for a couple weeks, but the ladybugs are clearing them out! No disease issues except a little Cladosporium on spinach and good venting eliminated it. Hot water treating spinach seeds for the past 4 years seems to have eliminated most of our diseases, especially Fusarium. This morning it was 8 degrees and we got snow yesterday. The tunnels had a low of 27 degrees under 3 layers of row covers with no extra heat. The strawberries (Chandler in annual bed system) started flowering last week, and under 3 layers of row covers in the field, the monitoring unit showed 29 to 30 degrees so hopefully we didn't lose too many. The flowers are tucked down in. We rototilled some areas of our sandier soils last week and plan to do some spring cover-crops soon. Storage crops are holding well, markets have been steadily busy all winter, and we are even finding time to get our wood split for next winter!

FOOD LOSS SURVEY AIMS TO IMPROVE FARM GLEANING IN VERMONT

Salvation Farms has launched the Vermont Food Loss Survey and is looking for Vermont vegetable, fruit, and berry farmers to participate. The purpose of this survey is to find out how much food loss there is on Vermont farms each year, and to identify opportunities for future action. By taking the first part of the survey - which takes no more than 5 minutes to complete - you will be entered into a raffle to win a \$100 gift certificate to a Vermont location of your choosing. You will also have the opportunity to take the second part of the survey - which takes no more than 10 minutes to complete - and you will be entered to win a \$300 gift certificate. Please go to http://middlebury.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8kXsWODKUyGzDet to take the survey on your smartphone or on a computer. If you have any questions, please contact Elana Dean at edean.isgood@gmail.com.

NRCS EQIP APPLICATIONS DUE APRIL 15

Apply for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program by April 15th. This year, NRCS will make available a total of \$11 million to farmers and forest landowners in VT to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. Approximately 75% of the funds that are available will be targeted toward conservation practices that support water quality improvements in the Lake Champlain watershed. There is also the potential for up to 90% funding for practice installation targeted to customers who qualify as historically underserved. Contact your local NRCS office for more details or visit: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/site/vt/home/>

FARMLAND ACCESS WORKSHOP APRIL 25

Are you interested in leasing, purchasing, or reclaiming farmland? Join RAFFL, the Intervale Center, and the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture for this workshop focused on land access. A panel of farmers and lenders will share their tips and experiences related to finding, financing (or leasing) land. You will then learn how to use the ANR Atlas to check soil types on potential parcels. The second portion of the workshop will involve a thorough on-farm land assessment at Sunrise Farm. By examining soils, water systems, and infrastructure at the farm participants will leave with tools for evaluating farm properties. Snacks will be served. The full agenda is at: <http://www.rutlandfarmandfood.org/landaccess/agendawrj>. RSVP to Jen Miller at jen@rutlandfarmandfood.org or 802-417-7096.