



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – May 20, 2014  
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## REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Dummerston) The early crops got a late start this year and the heat-loving crops are out early. We've transplanted the field tomatoes already though I might have to run out this evening and add a few more row covers. I had to postpone the start of the CSA harvest season for the first time in 13 years. But all the little greens for the first pick-up are coming along well. Unfortunately so are the weeds. I sealed up all my brassica greens under row covers to keep the flea beetles out and now there's lots of crab grass sprouting under the covers. I'm going to have to pull out all the covers and weed soon before that grass becomes an impenetrable mat. Strawberries are flowering nicely -- time to go cover then in case it frosts.

(Westminster West) Sales are finally returning to normal after the worst April in several years for early plant and herb sales. Garlic crop is looking much better than last year's disappointing crop; very few non emerging cloves. Got a late start on planting our field onions due to wet soil on our lower fields but will have them all in a day or so. New 4WD tractor is allowing me to plow much better and quicker than my old 34-year old tractor; engine is much quieter than I expected as well. Diesel technology has certainly advanced, let's see if this one lasts as long as the last one did! Farmers' markets got off to a slow start due to crappy weather, people want that perfect day to go to market I guess. Potatoes go in next and just finished seeding 5,000 plugs of winter squash for setting out in 2 weeks with our new water wheel transplanter. Labor issues are bad this year, I'm seeing a worsening of the work ethic every year and it's making me think seriously about using foreign workers if things don't straighten out. Greenhouse bug control is going extremely well now with hardly any aphids or white fly and just a few thrips. No diseases either. Definitely used more fuel this winter and spring; with cold temps tonight still continue to use fuel.

(Charlotte) We are busy getting the farm ready and planting black raspberries, blueberries, fall raspberries, and strawberries. The strawberries are blossoming, and the blueberries look strong. Everything seems to be behind by a few weeks.

(Rochester) Looks like we will escape a killing frost this spring. We had a 27 degree night early in May but the blueberries had not bloomed at that point and we had no damage. Pruning is done, bumblebees have arrived, and planting is about to start. We are full of hope for a strong season.

(Randolph Center) This spring we worked to cross as many t's and dot as many i's as possible in the fields in the event that we repeat last year's onslaught of precipitation. Last year, as we lost crops one by one, I worried that the little details that had been overlooked for the past few decades were compounding the issues brought on by the regular heavy rains. So this year we've subsoiled every tilled acre, rotated nearly every crop, no-till seeded some land back to hay, turned over some sod, worked toward optimum levels of all nutrients on the soil tests (which included a serious dose of lime) and have a full arsenal of pest fighting tools on hand. Going through the sprayers and making sure they're set to roll is left to do. I will sleep better knowing that we've attempted everything we can to meet the crop's needs if they're pushed to the limit again this year. I am also laying the groundwork to be setup for planting corn and fall cucurbits with zone-till in 2015. Preparing to deal with crop residue without tillage, effective weed control strategies and finding the right coulter setup for my John Deere planter are priorities to make this happen.

(Burlington) Finally a few days of sun have things moving outside and in. Lots of crop in the ground, almost back on our planting schedule after weather delays. Happy last fall with our cover crops, but not so happy with our vetch overwintering, a lot of spotty re-growth in our oat-vetch plantings which are usually the best. It seems to correlate with areas that had standing water at some point. Our typically wetter fields with fewer low spots had better survival, which surprised me, since I always thought soil type drove a lot of the overwintering success. Paying more attention to fertility this year, and spreading more of our organic fertilizer pre- and at-planting, with minimal side dressing planned.

(Fairfax) We invested in greenhouse controllers this year, primarily to control humidity and for using DIF with our bedding plants. Once we got them going were loving them. With John Satz and Andy Knafel's advice we went with igrow 400's. Very nice with lots of controls, for DIF, roof and side vents, ventilation fans etc. They are a bit pricey at \$1500, but very well built. Realizing I have houses with just ventilation fans and single heaters, wanted to see if there was any controllers that were less expensive where I could set humidity levels and day and night temps. There are lots out there, primarily designed for growth rooms but they do work for greenhouses. We tried Autopilot controllers. They are cheap approx. \$200 and can control temp., humidity and CO2. They are not much more than a couple of thermostats.

We went with the Autopilots because they included an external humidity and temp. sensor, although with only 15 ft. of wire. At least I can get it at crop level. So far they have worked great. We will see how long they last. With all the sensor and digital technology getting less expensive looks like there will be more options. We're hoping this will help with all our humidity and Botrytis issues. Other than that things are finally starting to grow, still no bloom yet in strawberries. Maybe it'll be a year where I don't have to frost protect!

(Guilford) Strawberry fields look great but cut flowers so slow in hoop houses and slugs cranking up outside. Strange flower spring so far. Wondering about SWD timing this year.

(Williston) Hoop house yields were lower than expected with spinach fairing the best. Just too many below zero temps and not enough row cover to protect crops. I used only 1 layer of #19 Agribon which was not enough. This spring has been a long one with cool temperatures. I was able to make my raised beds and lay plastic just before an inch of rain came. The wind made it a challenge but none blew away. The Rain-Flo bed former works great but I had trouble with beginning and end of rows. There must be an easier way to work it that the You Tube videos did not show. I put down straw in rows to minimize erosion in the paths. Planting parsley and cilantro into plastic. Have been harvesting chives, tarragon, lovage and oregano. Will be planting tomatoes, peppers and eggplant in hoop house this week. Hoping the temps stay above freezing from now on.

(Hampton NY) Winter rye cover crop finally started growing and is going gang busters. Kale, collards, cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower transplants are in the ground. We are pushing the envelope and have begun to plant our tomato, zucchini and summer squash transplants in the field. We have also begun seeding green beans, radishes, beets and Swiss chard. Spinach and peas are up and thriving. Peppers will not be transplanted early even though soil temps under the landscape cloth suggest that they could be planted as the air temps are still too cold.

(Little Compton RI) Our experiment to start kale transplants two weeks before the winter solstice and two weeks after didn't work to slow down bolting in April. We are not scientists but the message is clear; it's better to start Kale transplants in February and treat them well. We finally dug the soil out of our oldest spring tomato greenhouse. It has had spring tomatoes for 27 years and the last three years the crop has always ended with various diseases that usually only attack weak plants. It cost us \$900 beginning to end, and what a difference! I think this will be repeated in our second house which is now 18 years. Lost a lot of garlic to winter kill or bloat nematodes, don't know yet. CSA ended up fully enrolled so we are blessed. Cool weather means we will open our farmers' market this Saturday with not much to show up with.

(Plainfield NH) A welcome rain blew through this past weekend and allowed us to lay a bunch of plastic and get planting really under way on what has been a very late and slow season for us. Whereas the strawberries are full bloom in the southern part of NH, we are barely out of popcorn stage. Had a thrips issue with INSV early on with grafted heirlooms a while back, but seem to have all the bad boys rouged out and GH tomatoes are really kicking into high gear. Blueberry fruit set looks very good, so we pruned a little more aggressively this year, and raspberries look good as well. Sales very slow in retail greenhouses, but much improved since Mother's Day. It's too early to say if we will get caught up or not.

#### BEGINNING FARMER SUPPORT AVAILABLE

The Intervale Center offers production technical assistance, financial coaching, marketing coaching, business planning, and other support at various levels for farmers in their first 10 years of operation. Space is available for aspiring farmers or current farmers who are interested in receiving this kind of support in 2014. To enroll or find out more contact Maggie Donin at [maggie@intervale.org](mailto:maggie@intervale.org) or (802) 660-0440 x116.

#### DRIP IRRIGATION WORKSHOP June 3 from 4-7 pm

Location: Walker Farm, 1190 US Route 5, East Dummerston, VT 05346. Trevor Hardy of Brookdale Fruit Farm in Hollis, NH, one of New England's largest irrigation suppliers and designers, will walk us through the basics of drip irrigation in the field and greenhouses. Specific topics include: Design, layout, and component selection; Determining water requirements and irrigation scheduling; Operation and maintenance of the system; Fertigation for efficient nutrient applications. Ginger Nickerson, UVM Extension Produce Safety and GAPs Coordinator, will discuss source water sampling protocol and how drip irrigation fits into a produce safety plan. There is no charge but please register at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/micro-irrigation-workshop-tickets-11647787847>

#### 2014 ON-FARM WORKSHOPS

Mark your calendars for these events, sponsored by NOFA-VT, VVBGA, UVM Extension and USDA Risk Management Agency. The fee is \$10 per workshop for NOFA or VVBGA members, \$20 for others, details coming soon.

-July 16 at 5pm. Make-it or Break-it with Mid-Summer Organic Storage Crops. Burnt Rock Farm, Huntington, VT

-July 31 at 5pm. Profitable Small Acreage Production. High Ledge Farm, South Woodbury, VT

-August 11 at 5pm. Do's and Don'ts of Establishing a Commercial Blueberry Stand. Waterman Berry Farm, Johnson, VT

-August 14 at 3:30 pm. Pest and Disease ID and Scouting. High Mowing Farm, Putney, VT

-August 27 at 2 pm. Tractors, Tools, and Tricks for Mechanical Cultivation. Diggers' Mirth Collective Farm, Burlington, VT

-September 9 at 4:30pm. Behind the Scenes at Kilpatrick Family Farm. Granville, NY

-September 30 at 4pm. Season Extension and Winter Storage at Luna Bleu Farm. South Royalton, VT