



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – May 5, 2015  
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## REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Montpelier) Finally drying out. Temperatures still below normal. Winter spinach did not "come alive" until late March this year. Started bolting 3rd week of April and we are tearing it out to get set for summer. Winter spinach production way off this year. First time I have ever had freeze burn on the edges of the leaves. Deer appear to have done quite well this winter and the population is very high, not a good thing. Plenty of starts going and will get going on planting this weekend. Waiting to see if symphylans make a return in my one house. If so will have to take out of production this summer and replace the soil. Only thing left to try at this point. Hoping we make up for the late start with a nice long fall.

(Waterbury) Garlic and strawberries are getting a slow start. Seems like the soil is taking a while to warm up. Garlic up above straw mulch about 2-3 inches. Strawberries really just starting to grow again over the past week after being uncovered on April 14. Garlic that wasn't mulched is about twice as tall, we'll see how bulb size compares in July. Raspberries and blueberries breaking bud, good warming and drying conditions forecasted!

(Hinesburg) Always seem to have flea beetle troubles in early hoop house brassicas (Asian greens, salad turnips, radishes). I tried to be more careful about getting the remay on right away. Flea beetles showed up in abundance around April 1, but plants seemed slow to show damage. Foliar fed with Nutrient Density Supply's 'Complete Feed' and Advancing Eco Ag's 'Sea Crop' each day for a week, and since then been drenching with the same about 2x/wk. Plants look great. About to get second harvest of arugula and Tokyo bekan. Minimal beetle damage. Mostly around the edge of a bed where the irrigation is a little sparse. Beetles have largely dispersed.

(Burlington) we have gone from winter to summer in the span of a couple of weeks. That said, probably it won't be a bad thing to have the irrigation all tuned up before we get to late May, when we usually need it. Had a bunch of our vetch that we planted in mid-August with oats last year go vegetative in the fall (maybe due to warm fall?) and as a result, it winterkilled, leaving us no vetch to speak of on many acres. This is the second time in five years this happened, pushing me to believe that we shouldn't plant any vetch until the August 20th or after. This bit went in about a week prior to that, which we used to get away with.

Otherwise, our winter share customers are happy with lots of spinach and lettuce, and most of the roots still look pretty good, though we are certainly culling more out than in November. Summer CSA is basically full so now we can really focus on the field.

(Charlotte) Strawberries are coming along nicely with this beautiful weather. The field is almost done to start planting some more berries. The cherry trees are in good shape which we planted last fall.

(Grand Isle) Seedlings are getting large in the greenhouses, but the soil temp and calendar dates say it is too early still to get fragile things out. We just ordered Trichogramma wasps, the caterpillar egg parasites that attack corn borer in peppers and corn. We had great success with the wasps last year and hope to repeat this year. We order from IPM Labs in Locke NY. A series of the little packages arrive in the mail box on a set schedule at which time we rush the packages to several spots in a field and hang them on a plant. We had better success this spring with tomato grafting through better control and monitoring of humidity. We measured the humidity both in the healing chamber and in the surrounding room. It meant purchasing extra humidifiers but seems worth the cost.

(Benson) I've been doing this long enough to not be surprised by the rapid transition from winter to summer (no spring of course) but it is still a shock. Onion planting going well although a bit late. All transplants need water right away so we're setting up the pipe lines and pumping essential water every day. Winter sales were quite good and were steady although with no growth. This seems like a good season to try and reduce costs of production as sales growth seems to be, at least for now, a thing of the past.

(Hinesburg) Obviously a slow start to the season with the cool damp April. A couple years ago we had started direct seeding on the 8th of April and were transplanting onions by the 20th. This year, barely got any seeds in in April and we are finishing our onions this week. But, the warmth and dry are making for some good catch up time this week and now, oddly, already starting to irrigate as the small plants and early seeds don't have established root systems.

(Plainfield) Greenhouse seedlings doing nicely. Hoping I have the right mix of varieties and enough plants the right size at the right time. And of course, enough customers. First planting of kale is set out, and suffering from drought and woodchucks. Seeding winter squash into cell trays this week. Pruning the raspberries. Will the cane borers be back?

(Norwich) What happened to Spring? First it's freezing and suddenly it's over 80! Got our first half acre of early potatoes green-sprouted and planted; lots of kale and some brassicas out; transplanted nearly twenty thousand pea plants and three thousand bean plants into plastic. Sounds nuts, but it works!

Started picking really nice over-wintered field spinach; planted really late in the fall to keep small. Cukes, Zukes and Summers going out this week with first corn transplants nearly ready. Bedding and veggie plant sales picking up with the nice weather last weekend, and looking forward to next when we have some workshops for customers. Working on growing our own nitrogen with several acres in rye/vetch and new plantings of pea/oats. Having good results with peas seeded into overwintered rye and cuffed in with light rotovating. Rain would help everything; already using irrigation more than usual for this time of year.

(Elmore) Hundreds of pear trees are pushing out their flowers, apricots in blossom. Very early for us and very very dry. New spinach is up but no asparagus yet. Worst winter injury in a long time to all marginal fruits. Shows us that while our climate may be getting warmer it is not getting any less cold in the winter even with plenty of snow cover. The most deer chewing I have ever noticed on our tree tips. The advantage is we do not have to feed our trees this spring as the multitudes of deer have fertilized them nicely. Too much to do. Everyday I am very grateful for my crew.

(Plainfield NH) We continue to climate surf by irrigating our sandy soils to encourage strawberries to leaf out and the direct seeded vegetables to germinate. Two weeks ago snow was falling on them. All the field work that could have been done in mid-April is now being crammed in. Greenhouse duties have been turned over to the sales crew and we rush to make up time in the fields. Today the emerging rhubarb is still very pink and the box elders, honeysuckle and soft maples in the woodlines are just starting to look green from a distance. So we are not behind. Not yet, anyways.

(Williston) Spinach is looking great in hoop house and the Winterbor kale had started to going to seed. A couple of weeks ago I left the hoop house sides up since it was warm, and deer came in for a midnight snack. They took care of my cover crop this past fall, too. Soil test for hoop house is back from Maine which took a bit longer than I expected. A few days in the 80's have made things pop. The garlic is looking wonderful and had nearly 100 % survival thru the winter. Perennial herbs are starting to show signs of growth. The irrigation system from the pond is up and running so no more hand watering.

(Quebec) Not that wet but not that hot. I was surprised to hit frozen ground 1 foot deep when I was transplanting windbreaks. No major issues in the cold greenhouse, always have great trouble forecasting my yields a week in advance for my internet market ([marcheoutaouais.com](http://marcheoutaouais.com)). I would certainly be happy to get some advices on how not to stress arugula so it does not get too spicy in the cold greenhouse otherwise getting these leafy stuff when spring come is always a success, field leaves are just too late.

(Dresden ME) Field prep is well underway with a little over 8 acres tilled. Peas made it in the ground about two weeks ago, first planting of carrots and greens close behind. We are a bit worried about low soil moisture levels and how this might influence germination. Our onions and shallots are transplanted into black (for early onions) and silver plastic mulch. The onion starts looked great this year with regular fish emulsions and clipping with a hedge trimmer. In our asparagus we are trying a combination of flame weeding and shallow rototilling (pre emergence) above crowns for weed control. We are also experimenting with straw mulch on several beds. We had a close call with the flame weeder and the dry asparagus ferns. It got pretty exciting for a second or two! We pack a pump sprayer for these situations, and though at times we felt a bit outgunned the flames were quelled. Potted tomato plants have first blossoms showing. There was concern about ammonia levels generated by unfinished compost. It's crazy to think that tomato trellising and pruning is high on the list of things to do. We are transitioning unheated winter greens tunnels to tomatoes starting this week.

We have a solid team of draft horses to integrate into the farm system. They are grazing the winter rye and vetch to cut down on the hay bill and stimulate tillering. Then we will start with some spring tooth harrowing and fertilizer application and move onto planting spring cover crops and cultivation. We are experimenting with early spring fallows in our winter squash field which has a lot of chickweed. This will then be planted in mid to late June with Japanese millet and some other TBD species. Mustards will be planted on last year's potato and carrot ground as a biofumigant to hopefully reduce Rhizoctonia populations and manage scab.

Sunday night family meetings are becoming more fluid and efficient as we move to integrate the third generation into the farm. We are working towards scheduling these preweek planning sessions before Sunday but are struggling to find any other time. Thursday and Friday we are flat out prepping for markets and Saturday afternoon everyone is pooped and not the most personable :). These meetings are wonderful and have lead to a more unified direction, image of the week's priorities and individual responsibilities within the family.

(Argyle NY) Winter spinach in the unheated high tunnel was one of our best crops ever with 16 varieties. We feel the 2 drenches of Rootshield Plus, Serenade and Actinovate have been beneficial. We like the diversity of varieties as they all have some pros for color, timing, production. Many are still going strong. The Salanova lettuce is a favorite though we realize the early plantings (Aug 20) and later plantings (Sept 20) work the best in the cold winters. They must not be too large going into the cold time, so we harvest the early plantings in Dec/Jan. We're just harvesting the later plantings as full size heads of lettuce, but have been harvesting the last 2-3 plantings with great production since early April, with earlier seedings harvested in March. Kale and chard also gave tremendous production each week in the tunnels all winter and are still producing. White Russian and Siberian holding the longest before bolting.

Lots of crown spinach mites all of a sudden this week, but all tunnels were 99% insect and disease free all winter. We brought in ladybugs in early April to keep aphids under control. We made two field seedings of carrots, beets, spinach, herbs, arugula, peas and radishes. Did our first tractor cultivation today on all seedings and transplants- seems like summer! Tarnished plant bugs have been out for 2 weeks and just saw our first flea beetles so covered the arugula with Biothrips netting (25 gram, which we like for no heat buildup and visibility of the crop). Annual bed Chandler strawberries are flowering and the plants look great, on track to start production the last week of May. Forum and Bridger onions planted out in early November in a low 6' high x14' wide tunnel look fantastic and we are on our final crates of storage winter and red onions from last fall, so not much break in onions for customers. Winter farmers' markets were up a bit from last winter and our opening summer day was normal sales for May. Our diversity with the root cellar plus tunnels gives us over 27 diff items to sell, including fresh dug Tadorna leeks and parsnips! Now if we can just finish the addition on our washing station and get the new cooler built.

#### MANDATORY PESTICIDE SAFETY TRAINING FOR GROWERS – 7 LOCATIONS

All growers, organic or conventional, that apply pesticides to an agricultural commodity on their farm are required by the Worker Protection Standard (WPS) to be trained prior to doing so. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets (VAAFMM) will offer this free training at seven locations (below). Once trained, you will receive a green Handler Card from VAAFMM valid for five years. (If you previously received a card, check to make sure it is current.) VAAFMM Field Staff will be inspecting farms and documenting training verification. Applying pesticides to an agricultural commodity without a current Handler Card is a violation of the WPS and subject to a fine.

Preregistration is mandatory for these trainings. Contact Annie Macmillan at 802-828-3479 or [anne.macmillan@state.vt.us](mailto:anne.macmillan@state.vt.us) (Additional group training is available by request.)

May 14, 9-11 am. Yankee Farm Credit, 52 Farmvu Dr., White River Junction

May 15, 9:30-11:30. USDA Service Center, 170 South Main St., Rutland

May 15, 1-3 pm. UVM Extension, 23 Pond Lane, Suite 300, Middlebury

May 18, 9-11 am, UVM Extension, 374 Emerson Falls Rd., St. Johnsbury

May 20, 9:30-11:30. Emory Hebard State Office Building, 100 Main Street, Newport

May 21, 10-noon. Butterfield Library, 3435 US-5, Westminster

May 22, 9-11 am. UVM Extension, 655 Spear Street, Burlington