



**Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – June 2, 2020**  
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## **REPORTS FROM THE FIELD**

(Westminster) From 92 F. to frost in three days – I guess that’s New England weather for you. We’re about a week behind, still, because of the dry, cold weather, and we could use some rain. We’re starting to cut lettuce and kale, and hope to be picking strawberries soon, if last night wasn’t too cold. All our H2-A workers are here and healthy.

(Guildhall) Potato planting got a slow start but has hit its stride now. We started 5/23 and have got about 35 acres in now. About 10 acres more to go and we can start planting squash & pumpkins. Not too much innovative this year except we planted back our own Gold potato seed, and we’re spreading 300# of gypsum to the acre with our fertilizer this year. Sold the remainder of the 2019 crop this week, just in the nick of time, as last week’s 95-degree weather brought the potato house temp up to 50 degrees, and some varieties started sprouting.

(Orwell) It seems that we transferred all of the time we usually spend hauling kids around between sports, school, day care, and socializing into hauling little packages of greens, meat, eggs and other foods to friends and friends of friends. Without much effort, we quickly built up a list of 140 people, with about 50 ordering regularly, for a weekly delivery. It felt like the right way to serve our community and motivated us to stay on top of our salad greens more than usual, while it also provided a little early season income. We decided to halt the deliveries after last week as it seems safer for people to shop in their usual places and also to allow us to focus more on our summer crops.

We have one tunnel that lost plastic in a storm a few weeks ago and the wind hasn’t stopped blowing since. We struggled to get one sheet on (and it got pretty beat up in the process) and now can’t find enough calm or enough hands for that second sheet. Despite the unease of flapping plastic, our tunnels are all planted and for the most part everything looks great despite being behind on trellising and pruning. We had some Botrytis pop up in the heat last week and aggressively pruned leaves to try to beat it back. Now we have to piece together the complicated matrix of part time help in this time of social distancing and do our best to keep everyone healthy.

(Charlotte) The blueberries and black raspberries have loads of blossoms, and as long as we don’t have a frost, it should be a great season. We have tried a few new outlets for our frozen berries since we weren’t able to sell them to the bakeries these last few months, and it turned out well. A lot more work, but at least we were able to find a market. Haven’t seen as many pollinators like last year. Assuming that it is due to the cool weather that we have been having.

(Craftsbury) We have proceeded with our Spring work to date as though this was a typical year. Losing ourselves in pruning, weeding, fertilizing and mowing on the hillside has allowed us some distance from deciding if and how we can have a blueberry season. The contents of the AAF&M's "Pick-Your-Own Restart Plan" has re-focused our attention. At this point, we are not likely to open as a PYO this year. To meet the letter of the plan will incur additional unanticipated costs (containers, shift to cashless, wifi, washing stations, signage) and need for more workers to supervise guests in field and around check in and out. Our traditional family-centered farm will need to assume a more uncomfortable relationship to guests re: masks, children, eating and social distancing in field, etc. Rather we will seek some collaboration(s) with organizations which are willing to harvest and sell and distribute in the region. We can do this for a year,

(Newbury) A very light spotty frost last night with no damage after spitting snow on Sunday pm. Asparagus going gangbusters after early spears were frosted. Potatoes and new asparagus starting to appear.

(Plainfield) Last year was my first year in 15 years or so with heavy mummy berry loss I had a half crop of berries (some due to SWD, maybe 10 to 15 gallons of loss). I asked pickers to pick up the mummy berries, instead of weeding or spreading mulch in trade for berries as I usually do. They picked up about 15 gallons of mummified berries, reducing the population on the ground.

This spring when the forsythia bloomed I scouted for the apothocea. I handpicked the first ones I saw, and then we physically disturbed a couple of times. I planned to spray urea (50%) 4.6 lbs. per gallon, but time got away from us. Now the apothocea are done (on May 29) and 3 days ago I went scouting for the conidia, just before the heat wave, over 90 degrees for several days, looking for the second stage infection. I found 2 or 3 oak leafed pattern brown leaves. This morning I took a long slow walk through the berries and hand-picked everything that seemed suspicious. (I am trying to avoid fungicides except lime-sulfur.)

The plants look beautiful, flowers are bountiful. I found a quart of suspicious leaves and I saw the white powdery conidia fungus on 2 or 3 of them; most did not have that white powder visible to my naked eye. I picked the flowers nearest the browned leaves and hope that I am knocking it back. I will look again after this rain that is forecast. It has been super dry and hot for the last 10 days or so. Completely unlike last year when it was cold and wet during this same period and I got completely hammered by mummy berry.

(Starksboro) Fiercely busy plant sales. Mighty dry, but consoling myself with the thought that the crops are all still small and have less water need. Wishfully thinking that we'll break this dry pattern by time the plants get bigger. Used the impetus of the Pandemic to pivot to online sales. H2a workers were 4 weeks late due to paperwork snafu. Fortunately, spring was late as well, but then it hit like a ton of bricks last week. They're reinventing the Farmer' Market. We'll see how that goes. I've cut back on some crops because some institutions are closed. Taking a chance on others, hoping things will be somewhat normal from August through October. Once again, we'll see.

(Elmore) Our snow melted two weeks ago, then last week it was 94 degrees on our hill. The flowering crabs love it, the spinach hates it and is curling up in our high tunnel. No vegetable seeds have sprouted outdoors yet. Currants are loaded with baby fruits and peach trees in high tunnel have hundreds of peaches on them! Young propagated cuttings are looking good as they like the heat as long as they have moisture.

We are not allowing customers to poke around inside our farm as usual, because things do not feel usual. Doing a lot of deliveries and there are a lot of orders for barnside pickup. not sure if our wholesale customers will be ordering from us this year as we are not sure how their business is doing, if they will reopen. We are still planning to harvest and freeze our fruit, but unsure what markets we will be able to sell to in this very unpredictable year.

(Plainfield NH) Extremely hot and dry conditions last week dictated a lot of irrigation and care while trying to get transplants into the ground. Ray has been using more white plastic in the fields, and that proved advantageous in this weather. Irrigating in an effort to maintain moisture in our sandy soils. Things look good, although lots of hand hoeing as weeds are coming on despite cultivations. Strawberries are catching up and we are in full bloom. No major pest problems yet. Blueberries are also in full bloom, both seem pretty late although the heat and moisture have them catching up.

Greenhouse retail sales were strong, due in large part to quarantine measures both self and government imposed. I'll bet the cost of doing business in the pandemic will counter any gains made in gross sales. Concerned about availability of packaging once we get into the produce portion of our season. Between the pandemic and FSMA, the cardboard industry is going to get a real boost.

(Ange-Gardien, Quebec) Market very strong and price not an issue. I almost completely stop marketing my produces and let buyers call me instead (I almost only do wholesale) as I am produce short. This gives more time to do what I like: manage the farm and have the right timing for field and greenhouse interventions. Very dry makes field weeding easy so far. Still have to learn to properly adjust tinweeder in 2-3 leaves field wheat. First male flowers on cantaloup. Seems like the mildew resistant basil is more susceptible to damping off (not sure if Pythium or Rhizoctonia) but it wiped out (literally) our second transplanting even if our transplants were at 4th leaves and use of Gliocladium. We increased our sweet potatoes acreage as we had more transplants and anticipate strong demand for those too. Should be a good year if we survive frost risk on May 30 and 31!

(Argyle NY) The weather has been up and down all spring. Last week was in the high 80's then last night was 38 degrees. Due to the snow storm in May, the rollup curtain motor on our tunnel failed due to blown fuses from snow buildup, and fortunately the alarms went off to notify us of the high temps in there!

We are overloaded with transplants to get planted, typical with June, along with not enough help. Strawberries in our annual beds just started producing last Friday, but we lost a bunch of the king blossoms due to radiational cooling in May, even with 4 layers of row-covers on!

The report from the lower Hudson valley is that most, if not all, early strawberries were lost that night. We are also in transition of our tunnels to summer crops later than usual because of the cool temperatures. Field production of greens like arugula, spinach, salad mix and head lettuce are in high production, but head lettuce is lagging in sales, which we feel is due to a change in generational buying habits. All about convenience now.

The overwintered onions are sizing up nicely but are later than usual. Flea beetles have come and gone in their first cycle; the leaf minor has been unbelievable in the chard in the tunnels, but it missed a lot of the spinach and beets in the field as they were covered fortunately. Irrigation has been important for several weeks, with no real rain in the forecast again. Online sales, which include home deliveries and pre-orders for market pickups have continued to stay strong and steady for many weeks, with new products continually being added, including items from other local farms that have been popular. We are looking for full-time help and have an apartment for housing. If any leads: Arnold.pvf@gmail.com

(Little Compton RI) For those who think they are too late to get PPP from the government, we just got our payment last week but only after four recalls from Kabbage.com who is doing the PPP for all the Farm Credits in the Northeast. There are strings attached to getting the monies as a grant: using funds to cover payroll (60%) and other utilities and rent expenses. All funds need to be used 8 weeks from the day it hits your bank account. Luckily, we are going into our high labor time of year, so we are all set.

Three weeks ago, three days of terrible winds took a high tunnel and launched it across two other houses! All because the rollup side ropes had gotten old and sunburned and gave out! We are changing all our rollup sides to a cordage recommended by Ledgewood Greenhouses which is available from Grainger's catalog # 45AV33.

Farmers' markets in RI and Conn. are over burdened with C-19 protocols; many of the anchor farmers we know (including us) are just not going to go. We are setting up at our home farm stand and doing very well. The one of the new rules is that everything needs to be bagged or boxed! For years we have had three tents with over 45 different vegetables. It is going to take five times the labor to make 45% of our normal income! Quarts of strawberries not allowed! If the C-19 recovery goes backward this summer, we are going to offer boxes of produce at set prices, which folks will just have to take what is inside. They will be pre-paid, with their name on it, and they will pick up at a location in the city. I can't see the effectiveness of customizing boxes. We will do three different sizes and go with that.

(Ontario) It is really crazy up here right now. 100% of our restaurant customers are closed or out of business. They represent a significant portion of our sales, so it is not a great start to the season. We are pivoting to some retail, but even that is touch and go; there have been on and off closures for COVID, and a lot of people are buying the cheaper imported Californian greens. We are giving it our best. We finally have our team here and out of quarantine so we are starting with staff a month later than usual, but luckily we had our teens home and they have really helped out. It would be a good year to be a CSA farm.

## **LATEST GUIDANCE ON PYO AND FARMERS' MARKETS IN VERMONT**

The VT Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets has posted PYO guidance dated June 1 and updated farmers' market guidance dated May 28 on this page:

<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/covid-19-information/covid-19-general-information-news>

### **LEEK MOTH UPDATE**

(Scott Lewins and Vic Izzo, UVM)

The first leek moth flight of the season is likely coming to a close throughout our region. Where they are present, leek moths have been mating and laying eggs on overwintering garlic and other alliums planted this spring. You may begin to see the characteristic windowpane feeding damage of the leek moth caterpillars over the course of the next few weeks. Typically, this first flight doesn't result in significant damage, though newly transplanted alliums as well as garlic scapes can be disproportionately affected because of the timing of the first larval generation.

Research conducted by our team over the last couple of years suggests releasing *Trichogramma* wasps during leek moth flights may reduce damage by more than 50%, and topping your onions prior to curing may eliminate leek moth damage while not impacting quality after 6 months of storage. For more information about the work we have been conducting on Vermont farms, take a look at our most recent research brief (<https://www.uvm.edu/agroecology/vepart-publishes-new-research-brief>).

Other leek moth management options include exclusion with row cover and chemical controls. Covering plants with row cover at night will exclude the nocturnal female moths from laying eggs. Where this is not feasible or cost effective, chemical controls can be applied. Spinosad (Entrust, organic) and spinetoram (Radiant SC, conventional) have been shown to be effective chemical controls but must be time timed appropriately, especially in onions because of caterpillar feeding behavior. Canadian research has consistently found that properly timed insecticide applications made 7-10 days following a peak flight of leek moth adults can effectively manage damage resulting from the following larval generation. For more information about leek moth in general, check out the Leek Moth Information Center website <https://nysipm.cornell.edu/agriculture/vegetables/leek-moth-information-center>

We have scaled back our own statewide monitoring efforts, however, we are proving leek moth trap setups along with a season's worth of lures, free of charge (while supplies last), in exchange for sharing your monitoring data via an online submission page. This will enable us to track leek moth flights throughout the season and provide periodic updates. If you have any questions or concerns about leek moth, or are interested in monitoring leek moth on your farm, please contact Vic Izzo ([vizzo@uvm.edu](mailto:vizzo@uvm.edu)) and/or Scott Lewins ([slewins@uvm.edu](mailto:slewins@uvm.edu)).