



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – August 1, 2023
Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension
(802) 656-7534, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu
<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Guildhall) We were not spared the flooding of a few weeks back. The CT river rose on 7/11 and submerged 12 acres under 5 feet of water for 55 hours. So that's all gone. About 22% of our crop. Essex county hasn't been included in any disaster declarations yet, we'll see if that changes, or if there will be any help from the state or feds. Generally counting my blessings it wasn't worse, there are so many farms that were devastated. If anybody needs potatoes to fill out a farmstand or CSA, we'll supply you with rock bottom prices.

In other news, the relentless rain before and since 7/11 has made taking care of the remaining 40 acres of potatoes difficult. We're doing the best possible job with weed control, but fields don't look as clean as usual by any means. Fungicide has been going down as frequently as possible, in addition to some spray for CPB, and the kelp product we foliar feed.

All in all, the crop looks good, though behind. Rows are filled in, everything is flowering, tubers are set. Pumpkin plants are way behind, but perhaps some heat and sun will pull 'em through.

(Berlin) We succumbed to cucumber beetles. And we're about to succumb to squash bugs. We've got a fair amount of Colorado potato beetle in the potatoes and into the eggplant. The weed pressure is fierce. One field remains very wet. On the positive side, we've finally got tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant ripening here in central VT.

(Westminster) At first, we didn't think the flood damage was as serious as that from Tropical Storm Irene; only 8-10 acres were underwater. But as the rain continued, we saw more disease and lost more crops. Expecting results soon of soil tests from flooded fields to determine if there has been any contamination. Our loss, so far, has been about a quarter million dollars. It's unclear at this point if there will be any financial help from the government.

We're somewhat hopeful for the fall: winter squash looks good, parsnips and carrots, too. But excessive rain leached fertility from the beet fields and that's worrisome. Storage cabbage appears good at this point and the onions are bulbing up nicely.

We've been fiercely planting rutabagas, purple-top turnips, and daikon and watermelon radish, hoping to recoup some of our losses with these late-planted crops. We also have large plantings of fall kale and collards. And we hope lettuce will come back online soon, after losing six plantings to rain and bottom rot.

Looking forward to our annual Jamaican Independence Day party next weekend!

(West Fairlee) Wild Hill Organics. Overabundance of rain, and the SWD have descended upon our blueberry crop with a vengeance this season. July 31 will be our last day open for pick-your-own. Years ago, we were open from around July 15 through Labor Day weekend. The last few years, however, we've closed (mainly due to SWD) around August 12.

(Grand Isle) Blueberries are doing very well. Dealing with Japanese Beetles, which are also doing very well. Rain has caused us to close a couple of times but no flooding in Grand Isle.

(Franklin) We have an average of 4 SWD female in our traps over the last two days. Salt float test was about 6 larvae from about a pound of berries. Berries seem to be falling off bushes easier than normal (even before SWD). Maybe due to late frost or heavier than usual bird pressure.

This very wet year appears to have caused excessive new growth and I'm guessing it's the cause of bushes to be more flexible than normal (in a bad way). I'm also guessing this year's excessive growth will cause bushes to be a bit lanky next year, even with aggressive pruning. Earlier I was worried about Japanese beetles, but the numbers seem to be reducing.

(E. Wallingford) PYO blueberry season is off to a good start. Mid-season berries are large and loaded with fruit, some branches breaking due to weight. Battling weeds. No signs of SWD; just did salt water bag test. New peach trees are growing well. Vegetables are a different story; lots of disease and weeds but starting to look better with drier weather and catching up with cultivating

(Westfield) We were lucky, our small stream started to go over the bank near a greenhouse, but we were able to control it with sand bags. Our new strawberry field was planted after a crop of mustard and the weed pressure is very low which is good as it is hard to do any cultivation. Also good to have sandy soil in a very wet year so most of our crops are doing alright, one of our best crops of garlic, and winter squash are looking good so far.

(Winchester NH) In July we made out with only about 11" of rain, and never more than 2.7" in any event. Also, there are no rivers close by so overall we've been spared from the worst weather. Sympathies out to everyone who fared worse. Best looking harvests this year so far have been carrots, beets, celery, cabbage, radishes, and scallions. The winter squash appears under-nourished and, we're unsure why but the yellow potato seed piece germination was much worse than either the white or the fingerling -- now the gaps are tough to keep clean.

Disease concerns have been the usual early season malaise of *Rhizoctonia* in the beets, spinach, and lettuce, and *Cercospora* in the beets and chard. For insects, this has been our first year since 2007 without having to address the Colorado Potato Beetles. We have seen more usual level of pressure from flea beetles and thrips. This year, with some "Wizard" seeders, we're trialing carrot plantings with 2 lines of carrots in each row, spaced 2.5" apart, rather than just one row. We're still waiting to see if the carrots have enough room to size up, so maybe there's the answer. Wholesale demand around here has been sufficient so far.

(Salisbury NH) Tomato plants in hoop house loaded with disease; probably early blight. After many years of growing beets and chard, *Cercospora* is on all plantings.

The deer have been munching too; really love Maxibel green beans that don't get fat, just longer if you're behind in picking. Bamako yellow is prolific but hard to pick and a not as yellow as I'd like. When I planted Maxibel and Bamako in the same row, something ate the heck out of Bamako leaves but left Maxibel alone. It might have been slugs with all the rain.

Raspberries were terrible picking this year. Lots of overripe with a few perfect and then underripe so have to move around a lot just to pick one pint. Fall raspberries look better. Had an explosion of Japanese beetles. Luckily they are on my grape vines which make a nice trap crop. Summer squash and zucchini early plantings have very few blossoms. At least they didn't get loaded with squash bugs. The new plantings are stronger and hopefully will blossom during dry weather. Everything is late this year and in lower quantities. But I feel bad whining when so many have suffered much worse in the floods.

(Argyle NY) What a welcome change in the weather! I always say, "it's a good day when you have to put a sweatshirt on in the morning." I'm sure the hot weather delayed ripening of tomatoes, so here we go! Greens did well during the heat, but cucumber beetles were out in force on cukes and squash. Flea beetles are the usual bother in bok choy and arugula. No leafhoppers on the potatoes yet.

Diseases have been minimal so far except on cukes and squash. Weeds are our biggest problem due to lack of labor, even though we reduced our acreage. An average sales year despite the weather being all over the place. Our farm skirted the flooding and the heavy rains. Peppers, eggplants, tomatoes in the tunnels are all picking up production nicely. First corn is ready.

An odd (and new to us) problem has been pillbugs all spring and summer destroying the basil. Trying to keep seedings on time but it's hard with all the rain. Tarping has helped. Planning the winter tunnels now and will start seeding for them before we know it!

(Little Compton RI) First, us southern New England farmers send out our thoughts and prayers to those who have had unspeakable stresses and loss these last few months. Anyone who does this for a living knows we farm for the intangibles more than the money. Best of luck to those who find a way through.

We are trying two deer repellents: Plantskydd is OMRI approved, to be put on the plants. Trico is in the process of getting approved, so we spray it in the tree lines around our most deer-prone crops like beans and sweet potatoes. We also put up a Wellscroft three-dimension deer fence and keep it baited. So far so good.

Greenhouse tomatoes are not doing well. We need to give them more space and do weekly treatments of Double Nickel and Copper when disease pressure is this high; too late for first two houses.

The federal WIC credit card system is a complete disaster! All July, at every weekend market, the system broke down. And we still don't have a guarantee that we don't lose a percentage of the price we charge. About to give it up.

SOIL HEATH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SATURATED SOILS

Becky Maden, Vegetable Nutrient Management Specialist, UVM Extension

Flooding and prolonged saturation of soil from excessive rainfall can have negative impacts on soil health. Nutrients in a water-soluble form, like nitrate and potassium are likely lost through leaching. In saturated conditions, most beneficial microbes become inactive or die, which leads to further nitrogen losses via denitrification. Phosphorus is also less available during and after soil saturation because anaerobic soil conditions reduce vesicular arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi (VAM), which are organisms that assist crops in P uptake. Some strategies to remediate soils:

1. **Sidedress nitrogen** for annual crops at a rate of 30 to 40 lbs./acre of N. The [presidedress nitrate test \(PSNT\)](#) is useful to understand how much available nitrate-N is in the soil. The cost is \$10 through [UVM's Ag testing lab](#). This test is part of the free package of soil tests being offered to farms with flooded fields, through August 15.
2. **Sidedress other nutrients such as phosphorus, potassium, magnesium for longer season and fruiting crops**, based on soil test results.
3. **Improve soil biology.** One of the best ways to rebuild soil biology is to grow a cover crop, ideally a legume/ grass mix. Living roots will help rebuild fungal networks and other microbial activity.
4. **Physical soil management.** Surface crusting may exacerbate prolonged wet periods and make sidedressing or seeding difficult. Use gentle cultivation to break up surface crusts and help aerate the soil.
5. **Promote growth of stressed plants.** If fruiting plants survive but are stressed, remove flowers and fruit to promote vegetative growth.

POLLINATOR SUPPORT REPORT

Laura Johnson, UVM Extension Pollinator Support Specialist

In July, folks asked, how do pollinators respond to flood events? About 75% of all bee species are ground nesting and excessive soil moisture alone is not always detrimental to their survival. Some bee species can withstand long-term flooding and have waterproofing adaptations. A common spring tree fruit pollinator, *Colletes inaequalis* (Cellophane bees), lines nests with a cellophane-like substance that protects nests from spring moisture and seasonal flooding. However, some bees may not be adapted to flooding. In cases of extreme flooding and/or the sediment deposition and soil erosion, bee emergence may not occur, be delayed, or nests may be totally displaced.

While studies show extreme flood events can be devastating to local ground-nesting bee communities, particularly in the year immediately following flooding, research also shows that populations do rebound. How quickly might depend on the local landscape and community diversity prior to flooding.

Areas not flooded and within flight distance of a flooded farm may house bees or other pollinators able to pollinate the following year's crop and/or seed the next generation of bees in the previously flooded areas. Special thanks to Emily May from the Xerces Society and Bryan Danforth from Cornell University for their help regarding this question.

UVM EXTENSION AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING UPDATES

Andy Chamberlin and Chris Callahan

Vegetable growers are seeking tools to improve flexibility and efficiency in the packshed. The AZS Rinse Conveyor is becoming a popular piece of equipment to meet the need to rinse off a variety of crops. A new blog post has been published. Farmer's Favorites: The AZS Rinse Conveyor: <https://go.uvm.edu/ffazs>

Two new podcast episodes of the Farmer's Share are: Speed Disking Rye with Mark Fasching (Jericho Settlers Farm): EP9 and Visiting Walker Farm with Jack Manix: EP10. Visit <https://thefarmersshare.com> to see photos and visits from the visit and listen to the interview on your favorite podcast player.

We are getting into the season of drying flowers, herbs, hops, hemp, etc. Learn about the basic principles, drying methods, equipment options, and links to other resources and calculators at <http://go.uvm.edu/herbdrying>

AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE IS COLLECTING DATA ON FLOOD DAMAGE

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets is requesting information from farms and organizations who were impacted by the flooding and severe weather that occurred between July 7 and 18. The purpose of this survey is to capture the type and scale of the damage suffered by agricultural producers in the state. Survey data will be used to inform response efforts, allocate resources, and advocate for future relief and recovery programs. The survey should take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete and will remain open until August 28, 2023. Link to survey: <https://forms.office.com/g/VXfb1jGTc4>

UPCOMING ON-FARM EVENTS

August 5, 4-6 pm. Workshop on [Pollinator Habitat](#). Luna Bleu Farm, South Royalton, VT. Join NOFA-VT, University of Vermont Extension, and Vermont Vegetable and Berry Growers Association for this hands-on workshop to increase your understanding of wild pollinators and practices that support them in diversified agricultural landscapes using flowering cover crops, habitat blocks, mowing, pest control, and pollinator monitoring.

August 9, 3-5 pm. [VVBGA workshop](#). Small Axe Farm, Barnet, VT. Topics: Reducing erosion on a steep slope, managing pests with wild habitat, intensive no-till production. This small, organic market garden grows a diversity of crops using no-till practices to promote soil health and prevent erosion, nurturing the natural habitat around the farm to reduce pest pressure on crops.

August 20, 10-noon. NOFA-VT workshop on [Intro to Seed Saving](#), Kindle Farm School, Townshend, VT. Learn how to collect, clean, and store seeds. Get hands-on practice harvesting, threshing, and winnowing seeds. Applicable for gardeners, homesteaders, and small-scale farmers just getting started with seed saving.

September 20, 4-6 pm. [VVBGA workshop](#). Evening Song Farm, Shrewsbury, VT. Topics: No till organic growing, reducing erosion on a slope, fall tunnel plantings. This diversified organic farm uses mulches, fabrics, cover crops, and no-till to reduce soil loss and improve soil health. The farm also produces crops year-round in the tunnels, and this workshop will feature the transition of summer to fall crops.