



VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWER NEWS – September 1, 2022

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<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(East Dorset) 2022 was a challenging year for a couple reasons. We certainly had issues with the dryness/lack of rain over the course of the season. The bigger issue was the crop loss due to wildlife. We have always had minor losses, but they never amounted to much. This season we estimate a 35 to 45% loss in pounds of blueberries picked compared to prior years. Next year we will probably need to install fencing or netting. We had deer, bear, squirrels, chipmunks, turkeys, and birds all poaching the field. Lots of fruit eaten and many branches broken.

The bear was the most interesting, because in years past he would only come in the middle of the night when it was cool, and no people were around, and he came every two or three nights. This year he rambled through the fields anytime day or night. He was very persistent and came every day. We got no help from our pickers to run him off. They all enjoyed watching him eat sometimes as close as 15 to 20 feet away. When they came into the store, they were happy to show us their videos and photos. We gave some of our regular pickers airhorns and asked them to frighten the bear away, but they never used them. It would've been a more profitable season if we had sold wildlife viewing passes rather than blueberries.

We called the county game warden. He showed up one day with his wife and child and saw the bear while they were picking blueberries. But he offered no solutions. On a humorous note, one of our pickers yelled at me when I was scaring the bear away one afternoon. She said "Leave the bear alone. He's not hurting anyone." I told her who I was, and that I was worried the bear was getting too comfortable around people.

With that said, we look forward to 2023. Does anyone have any "farm stay" success stories? I am curious if that is a viable option for farms in Vermont.

(Burlington) Late summer is rolling toward autumn and we have our work cut out for us. Many of our storage crops look good: onion yield is strong, and quality looks good, despite a downy mildew outbreak and some early season wireworm losses. Squash is holding leaves nicely, and fall brassicas look great, though cabbage aphids are showing in small numbers.

We lost our entire Brussels sprout crop last year to cabbage aphid, so I'm trying my best to figure out something for this year. Will try Grandevo vs. the aphids, which worked very well against aphid outbreaks in our tunnels this summer that were blowing past our beneficials. I'll also try drop nozzles for the first time to see if that provides enough coverage lower down the stalks.

We suffered through a lot of tunnel maladies this year: tomato spotted wilt virus in one of our pepper tunnels, apparently vectored early in the life cycle by western flower thrips. I'm hoping we don't see a repeat of that, since the thrips theoretically shouldn't overwinter in the unheated tunnels. Fusarium crown rot killed many of our tunnel cucumbers, will aim to prevent next year with white plastic rolled out a month or so after transplanting to keep soil temps lower, and maybe some fertigation with Rootshield. Also lots of potato aphids, which seem to be carrying forward from winter to summer to winter, as we switch from summer crops to winter greens. I hear that the winter ladybug supply is better this year, so I hope that will allow us to keep a lid on things and reduce our aphid troubles in our tomatoes next spring.

All of this makes me appreciate the skill and accessibility of our UVM Extension professionals in plants, pests, and diseases, we are so fortunate to have them. Please consider supporting their good work through the Veg and Berry Research and Extension Fund when you renew your VVBGA membership this winter!

Our CSA members have been very happy after a strong spring start and good summer harvests of tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, cantaloupe and watermelon. Winter CSA sales start this week, with winter greens planting starting in earnest very shortly. Looking forward to fall harvest and cooler temperatures.

(Westminster) We're transitioning into our fall crops, with carrot and red and gold beet harvest underway. A few weedy beet fields are being harvested by hand and we're still picking some bunched beets, although the tops are starting to die back.

The winter squash harvest will start soon, and it looks really good. The dry weather has been great for the crop, keeping down disease. The foliage is green with no dieback, which protects the green-skinned varieties like acorn and buttercup from sunburn. Harvest of storage cabbage will begin soon, as well.

The chard is almost done after a good season; kale and lettuce are still going strong. We just put our last planting of lettuce; only red and green leaf, because romaine and Boston are susceptible to downy mildew in the fall. We'll soon be planting fall field spinach. And we're still harvesting plenty of sweet corn. Some will be frozen for sale to local school systems.

It's been an excellent season so far; very dry, sure, but we've gotten rain at fortuitous times and no damaging torrential downpours (fingers crossed).

(Guildhall) The end of July and first 3 weeks of August were very dry, but this past week we've had some good rain. Much needed, as a test dig 8/20 confirmed a great tuber set, but small sizes. Even since then we've been getting more chefs out of the little digging we're doing. Too distracted by construction to dig new potatoes at scale. Barns need rooves.

Really good news, we always plant whites on our lowest pH field, and this year the field was at 5.2 and those spuds are clean clean clean. No scab, no rhizoc, no nothing.

In preparation for harvest we had all the usual, plus a few procrastinated, wrenchings happen. Axle swaps on trucks, rollers, blades and wiring on windrowers, harvester gearboxes.

Pumpkins are amateur level weedy, totally gross.

(E. Wallingford) Still picking blueberries (Elliot) with no signs of SWD this year. Good pruning and trying to keep fruit off the ground seems to help. We received some decent rain in the last week or so and that really helped the pumpkins, sizing up nicely and starting to turn orange. Winter squash look good except where deer are eating. Ordered peach trees for spring 2023 planting, high density V system.

(Westminster West) We got an inch of rain a few days ago, too late for summer crops but a nice boost to the fall carrots, Gilfeather and Napa crops. Almost finished with the squash harvest and starting on pumpkins tomorrow. Seems like crops are at least a week earlier than last year and the yields and quality are much better. Almost all our crops are on drip lines with plastic mulch to maximize water efficiency and this was the year it really paid off.

First year I didn't need to spray the squash crop for insects or PM, I love dry years! Weed control was as good as it can be with the dry weather, except for potatoes which continue to mock me as far as weed control! But the potato crop looks great despite little rain; I did plant on historically wet fields so there's that. Covering the crop with remay really helped keep CPB away and pushing the crop to maturity as all potatoes are ready now.

Prices are not where they should be, all expenses are way up and I'm hoping the good yields compared to last year will make up for lower-than-expected prices. Looking forward to garlic planting and calling it a year!

(Plainfield NH) School season starts, and the vigorous stretch between here and Thanksgiving will put a strain on a very short staff. Labor shortages and a drought have hamstrung us this year.

The H2A program has failed us egregiously and will be a big winter discussion as to how we go forward. Our guys arrived late. and one never arrived at all. I don't think we are the only farm that has had problems. Despite help from our senators, it is difficult to isolate where the problems are in the system. It may be in the U.S. with Ice, DOL, or State levels, or maybe in Jamaica. We are hopeful of having some clarity on why our guys got hung up this year.

Lack of rainfall hampered crops and seemed to only help the weeds which got ahead of us because of the labor issues. Sales have been strong, and we are moving a lot of what we have, but fall root crops are falling far short of expectations. Take home message for us this year is put as much of your farm on drip in the early spring as possible as an insurance policy. That paid off many times over for us.

Bumper crops of cucurbits, tomatoes, peppers, melons are a direct result of that, coupled with recognizing disease threats and spraying when needed. The potatoes seemed to fall through the cracks as we experience some new diseases.

(Winchester NH) We're enjoying nice harvests of tomatoes, peppers, and spaghetti squash this week. We kept the downy mildew just enough at bay in the watermelons and cantaloupes, with a few copper applications about a month ago, to be harvesting a good round of those as well. But the field cukes are toast. Relatively low pest pressure currently, hooray! Maybe it's been too dry.

We're hovering between moderate and severe on the drought monitor, after recent storms yielded just a few tenths here and there. Daily irrigation pumping from shallow wells has been essential and tiring. The popcorn was too tall to accommodate our sprinklers, so that quarter acre was skipped, and now it's nearly all dead.

We got way over-extended this year, more than usual. The ubiquitous weeds are embarrassing, except a mass of stalwart lambsquarter and pigweed trunks shielded a corner of our winter squash planting when a storm brought down a big pine tree from the field edge.

(Little Compton RI) A tremendous level of stress this season. Not uncommon for those suffering from this drought. Counties around me getting rain and we are not! In July and August we got only .38" inch while areas to our north got over 2" plus. Last Tuesday, Rehoboth, MA got 7.62" inches of rain and ten miles south we got nothing.

Despite this, our biggest stressor this year is deer and other predators who wander in at night and destroy what you have spent so much effort to keep alive and turn a profit. The population has doubled in the last two years as seasonal hunters have almost disappeared! We are keeping some areas free with deer repellents but they are expensive. If this gets any worse we will have to rethink our entire farming operation. Oh, and did I mention that new Covid 2020 property owners from the city don't want to see deer fencing within 1/2 mile of their house, yet they are the first ones putting up 1/2-acre solar arrays to ecologically recharge their Tesla electric cars!

One tip for those growing organic winter squash, no doubt your leaves are going down with downy or powdery mildew. Be attentive to potential for sun scald on the dark green squashes like green acorn and dark green kabocha. With the sun still so bright and days so warm you can lose those dark colored fruit before you know it.

(Argyle NY) Our farm is located in a rain shadow, which means we miss or get a lot less rain than most. That is very true this year. The last rain we got .25" inch while around us 1.25" inches fell. Even with the large stream we have, I am forced to slow down, for the first time, to 100 gpm from 400 gpm to have enough water. Takes longer but at least we have water.

Overall, crops are doing well and we are catching up on weeding. Onions, as usual, are our only crop that isn't up to snuff. As we slow this farm down we have less fall crops to bring in so the reality of limited labor isn't quite so looming. Our online market has been steady along with attending a farmers' market every other week.

I read on the listserve about trouble with biodegradable plastic mulch. We are having the same issues with it breaking down earlier than usual. Been using it since 2008.

BE ALERT FOR CYCLAMEN MITES IN STRAWBERRIES

This pest is not visible to the naked eye. It can come in on nursery stock and cause serious damage if undetected and unmanaged. Cyclamen mites live and feed on the inside of folded leaves, the underside of newly unfolded leaves, in the crown, and inside flower buds and fruit calyxes. Females overwinter deep inside the crown of the plants and the soil posing a major threat to 2nd-year plantings. Due to their minute size, cyclamen mite infestations may go unnoticed, identified only when symptoms occur, including severely crumpled and crinkled leaves, and stunted plants. For images of symptoms and scouting info see:

<http://omafra.gov.on.ca/IPM/english/strawberries/insects/cyclamen-mite.html>

TEST SEED GARLIC FOR BLOAT NEMATODE

To prevent spread of this pest, it's a good idea to test garlic seed before you sell it. The University of Arkansas nematode diagnostic lab charges only \$30 for out of state samples. You must fill out their submission form and also include their latest APHIS permit to ship samples to them from out of state. Contact me and I'll email you the forms.

RESOURCES FROM THE UVM AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING TEAM

Andy Chamberlin and Chris Callahan

A new Post Harvest Case Study has been published with photos, and a video highlighting the barn renovation project at the farm that's known to be birthplace of the CSA: The Next Chapter: Renovating a Barn to Sustain Indian Line Farm. <https://go.uvm.edu/indianline>

Several case studies are highlighted from small to large in terms of acreage and investment here. <https://go.uvm.edu/phcs>

Learn tools, tips and techniques to improve the sustainability of your farm by listening to the Ag Engineering Podcast available on your favorite app or visit <https://agengpodcast.com>

LATE SUMMER POLLINATOR REPORT

Laura Johnson, UVM Extension pollinator support specialist

From mid-July to the second week of August, we experience a seasonal floral dearth where wild sources of pollen and nectar for pollinators are greatly reduced. Late spring and summer blooms have passed and late summer and fall flowers, like goldenrod and burdock, have not yet opened with abundance until the latter part of August.

If you have managed honey bees, you may find them surviving off food stores they've gathered, or you may even need to feed them during this period. For farms with squash blooms and flowering cover crops, like buckwheat, mustard, or pollen producing sunflower, you likely have seen diverse wild pollinators on these floral refuges during the dearth period. Even non-pollinator dependent tasseling corn during this time serves as a food source for generalist bees, like honey bees and bumble bees.

It is during the latter part of the summer that we start to see some of next year's early season berry crop pollinators, bumble bee queens. They begin to emerge, mate, and feed to ready themselves to survive the winter. "In general, the phenology depends a lot on the species, with some queens flying in late July while others, including the ubiquitous common eastern bumble bee (*Bombus impatiens*), not flying 'till early September (Spencer Hardy, VT Center for Ecostudies)." During the 3rd week of August, we saw a northern amber bumble bee (*Bombus borealis*) queen and drone mating in a farm field while foraging on red clover. For more on bumble bee identification: <https://val.vtecostudies.org/projects/vtbees/bombus/>

FARM TRANSFER PLANNING FOR FRUIT AND VEGETABLE GROWERS

Zac Smith, UVM Extension Agricultural Business Educator

Succession planning is often complex and dynamic, with a variety of issues to address. The UVM Extension Agricultural Business team recently conducted a survey of Vermont farms in regard to farm succession preparedness. Nearly half the respondents requested business planning support for transitioning ownership of the farm. In response to this need, the team created a service that allows farmers to directly contact us and be assigned a specialist to help farmers find the information they need, and to provide feedback on developing a plan to address their farm's unique needs. This is a free service. [Click here to contact the agricultural business team.](#)

GIVE YOUR INPUT ABOUT ON-FARM ACCESSORY BUSINESSES

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture has been supporting the Natural Resources Board in preparing a report to the Legislature around Accessory-On Farm Businesses (AOFBs) and Act 143. We know that AOFBs are vital to long-term farm viability, but the current legislation can be difficult to understand and varies across the state. This report will analyze current conditions, understand challenges, and offer specific suggestions to help strengthen AOFBs in Vermont. Input from the agricultural community is needed! Please complete this survey by Sept. 7 <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/X9V72WL>

HOLD THE DATE FOR IN PERSON VVBGA ANNUAL MEETING!

Tuesday January 24, 2023, at the Capital Plaza Hotel, Montpelier, VT. Commercial members can reserve exhibit tables now, and/or become an annual meeting sponsor! To do so, please visit <https://vvbga.org/commercial-membership>