



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – September 6, 2011

Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension
(802) 257-7967 ext. 303, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu
<http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry>

It has been a difficult week for growers with flooded fields, and for the people that work with them. The Agency of Agriculture, Farm Service Agency, NRCS, NOFA, Extension and others are doing their best to assist. Some larger vegetable growers have hundreds of thousands of dollars of losses, and some smaller farms have had their crops totally wiped out; in some cases their fields have been destroyed, too. I've collected descriptions of losses and shared them with agencies and philanthropies to help them raise funds to compensate farmers for losses. These total about \$2 million so far and are posted at: http://www.uvm.edu/vtvegandberry/Pubs/Storm_Losses_VT_Growers.pdf. The descriptions are only from vegetable farms, but our dairy farming friends have also been very hard hit with flooding of feed crops. If you have not yet done so be sure to report your losses to the FSA using the agricultural damage assessment form linked to: <http://www.uvm.edu/extension/>.

I'm getting many questions about how to handle flooded crops and fields. State and federal agencies are working to clarify things including a long meeting on Sunday between the Agency of Agriculture and the FDA. Here is where we stand: the FDA is clear that edible crops exposed to flood waters are considered adulterated and may not be sold for human consumption. It may be possible to have some case by case exceptions but we do not know what the criteria are yet, or what the process will be; I will keep you posted but please be patient. Clearly, if there is evidence of upstream contamination from fuel tanks, sewage treatment or hazardous waste such an exception is very, very unlikely. Given the extreme flooding in much of the state I suspect that not many locations will be eligible. Meanwhile, it may be prudent not to destroy surviving storage crops in the field, or flooded storage crops that were harvested. Do destroy flooded non-storage crops after documenting the losses.

Edible portions of crops that were not exposed to flood water may be sold. I interpret this to mean that portion was above the flood water or that the plant had not yet formed it. Replanting flooded fields was addressed in my email last week – guidance is to do tillage once the soil dries then wait 60 or at least 30 days before sowing an edible crop but there are not clear guidance on this. Where you can, sow a cover crop and wait to plant crops until next year. Many biological contaminants will break down over time but heavy metals will not; testing for them is available through the UVM Ag Testing Lab (see below).

We are working hard to determine if any affected storage crops may be utilized, which might include testing for contaminants, however it remains unclear what will be credible enough to support possible exceptions to the FDA rule. Please be patient as we try to figure this out, though I know it is not easy. As always, feel free to contact me with questions or concerns. Vern.

UVM SOIL TESTING FREE TO FARMS WITH FLOODED FIELDS

The UVM Agricultural Testing Lab will assist vegetable farmers with assessment of post-flood soil conditions in their fields. On request, they will speed up their turn-around on both routine soil fertility tests and heavy metal tests, with results available in a matter of days. They offer both a heavy metals screening as an add-on to the routine fertility test and a heavy metals test that is similar to something an environmental lab would run. Choose the latter if possible metal contamination is your only concern. The heavy metal screening that accompanies the fertility test will inform you whether or not a metals problem exists (the environmental test will give more precise concentrations). Both tests are now being offered at no-charge to Vermont farms for flooded fields only, make a note on the yellow soil questionnaire submitted with sample that the soil is from a flooded field. The form, and regular price info for soil tests, is at: http://pss.uvm.edu/ag_testing/?Page=forms.html or call 802-656-3030.

NRCS EXTENDS APPLICATION DEADLINES

Thinking of applying for funds to build a high tunnel? Or want help making improvements to your farm's water supply? The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) in Vermont has extended its deadline to October 1, 2011 to apply to conservation programs including the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) so that landowners and operators affected by Tropical Storm Irene have additional time to apply for 2012 funds. Information about conservation programs and field office locations can be found at the Vermont NRCS web site: <http://www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/>

BUSINESS PLANNING HELP FOR FARMS AFTER THE STORM

The UVM Extension Farm Viability Program can offer business planning support to producers seeking to develop full business plans and/or create short term cash flow budgets. This business planning program can support your business as you decide how to recover from losses, deal with short term budget planning or consider re-investment for the future. Considering the short term decisions that need to be made following Irene related damages, we can also support the following two items. 1) Support preparing loan application materials (balance sheets and other financial statements) as disaster-related loan programs become available. 2) Cash flow planning to lay out the financial road map for recovery. Contact Mark Cannella, UVM Extension Farm Business Management Specialist at Mark.Cannella@uvm.edu or 802-223-2389 x207.

WHERE PEOPLE CAN DONATE TO HELP FARMERS WITH STORM LOSSES

The Vermont Community Foundation will be making grants to support all types of farms that have sustained losses. <http://www.vermontcf.org/give-now/> or 802-388-3355.

NOFA-Vermont's Farmer Emergency Fund assists organic farmers with grants and zero-interest loans. <http://nofavt.org/programs/farm-financial-resources/farmer-emergency-fund> or 802-434-4122.

The Vermont Farm Fund offers small, zero-interest loans very quickly to storm-affected farmers. <http://hardwickagriculture.org/donate.html> or 802-472-5840.

The Intervale Farmers Recovery Fund assists the farms located in that area. They were all flooded. <http://www.intervale.org> or 802-660-0440.

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Wolcott/Hardwick) No losses in our upper fields from the rain, just a little erosion in the usual spots that are rough. Our river field on the Lamoille was all in cover crop so no crops lost there either. We do have up to 2 feet of new soil in some spots deposited from someone else's field upstream. A few logs and a little creek decided to re-route into a field, probably will cost \$2-4K in dozer and excavator work. The town road decided to become a river and so lots of gravel in one section that I am hoping the town will want back. Some of these fields were under 5 to 6 feet of water. Our sewage treatment plant several miles upstream was able to handle the increased flow without any release of effluent so feeling good about that. My thoughts are with all of you who got hit harder.

(Warren) Even though this season is now a bust for us financially, we made a lot of headway on certain things. We started seeding things like parsnips and carrots on 5 rows 6" apart instead of 3 rows 12" apart. I did this to compensate in case of bad germination. It takes a little longer for the plants to get to maturity this way but they close the rows a lot sooner and if the germination is good which it was this year the yield is much higher. We found that by running onions through a brusher in the field to load them into bins helps with the drying a lot. It gets most of the dirt off and I think it opens up the skins a little bit. The biggest thing was that plants like water, even consistent water. In our movable greenhouse field we ran drip on everything and it went on at noon every day. The quality of everything in the field was excellent, including celery and celariac. We harvested over #1500 of kirby cucumbers out of a 30x96 area in the first 2 pickings. Other plantings that got drip once a week, or when I remembered to turn it on did not produce a fraction of that. I'm going to try hilling drip line into potatoes next season.

(Jericho) Here's what's going on in the fields that were not flooded: Fall brassicas are beautiful and just dodged a hail storm yesterday that fell half a mile away. Tomatoes are pretty much winding down due to various levels of late blight infection and we're pulling most out this week - but glad to do so in a way so we can get a jump on fall/winter plantings in the hoopouses, which are more exciting to us these days than tomatoes. Potatoes are harvested and in storage. They suffered from leafhopper damage this summer, but sized up well enough before significant damage as we planted early in May. Leafhoppers now hopping over to adjacent lettuce field, so fall lettuce plantings are going in another field further away to make the leaf hoppers work a little harder in finding them. Aster yellows disease in lettuce more abundant over the last month thanks to all those leafhoppers. Local farmers market incredibly busy this past weekend with lots of verbal and monetary support from customers. We now realize that we are avid gamblers and every spring is another roll of the dice.

(Hoosick Falls NY) We held off some fall direct seeding with the threat of a hurricane and now have to find a new patch of ground because as expected the first plot flooded. All in all even with historic flooding we came through loosing very little compared to some. Squash and pumpkins planted almost too late have caught up fairly well and some will certainly make a crop and if frost hold off perhaps all will make it. Late-planted Tomatoes are just starting to really come on well, plants are smaller than usual, they are in 12 inches of soil on top of rock, but that seems to be a good place for them otherwise.

Late sweet corn is doing well, potatoes seem small not sure if it was too much water early of too little later on, but they certainly have plenty now. Our best to you all with cleanup and rebuilding.

(Plainfield NH) Irene put us behind with damage to crops and cleanup issues. We are way behind in harvesting potatoes and have not even looked at our fall vines. Fall raspberries have loved the wet fall thus far and have sized up dramatically even through 3rd and fourth harvest. No late blight yet, despite all the tropical depressions very low CEW counts in traps, little or no damage in corn thusfar. We were expecting a wind event and having not gotten what was forecast was a blessing. The deposition of mud from the flooding in our fields is something we were not counting on and although it ultimately may be a blessing disguise, dealing with it has cost a lot of time in both hand labor and machine labor. Colloidal adhesion is a term I vaguely remember from my soils course, but this is apparently what it really means. I thought I would take my 90hp tillage tractor in with a big set of harrows and incorporate it but learned a tough lesson very quickly and when I finally settled down and resigned myself to the spader being the best tool we had despite the fact spading takes forever. The storm definitely has changed the soil composition of two of our fields.

(Shaftsbury) We feel very fortunate even though we have had 16" of rain in the last 21 day. Still, we really had no problems from Irene, and some crops are still growing though they are starting to look limey. Top dressing fall crops to bring back color. We are pulling out greenhouse tomatoes, adding some fertilizer, and watering in greenhouse ground to flame before winter CSA crops get planted inside. One more outside crop of greens to be seeded in a few days then the rest is indoors. Cover crops being planted for winter. Prepping for garlic planting. Greenhouse raspberries setting a nice fruit load, but still did not thin enough. I think one cane/sq.ft or less might be about right. We cut our's back in late June to about 3.5", and the shoots that form at that point really fill into an overly dense hedge restricting airflow.

(Westminster West) Feeling fortunate our farm received no damage and it hardly even rained here. although I was gone for a brief 2 weeks it feels like I'm returning to a vastly changed world. The leaves on the winter squash are mostly gone, quite a bit of powdery mildew on the remaining leaves. All the squash are ripe and we start picking tomorrow if it's not pouring. Yields look decent although won't know for sure until we start picking. Onions all in and they look nice; big and drying down well. Fall carrots and beets looking good even though I was worried about germination at least I won't have to thin anything! Gilfeather turnips putting on some size now. First time growing root crops in many years and it feels good to be back in the game. Early cover crops are up and look nice. Start grading out seed garlic this week and fulfilling orders. Lots of mums and asters shipping out this week and sales at the farmers markets are picking up for those as well. Pouring new floor in barn for produce storage and general storage. Our 33k solar array will be fully operational this week as well. Still transplanting herbs and vegetable starts for sale and other growers. Fall raspberries really coming on now and tunnel tomatoes are going bonkers! Having fun doing Brix testing on our tomatoes and other crops! Good luck and best wishes to everyone that has suffered from the storm.

(Argyle NY) We missed the wrath of Irene (5" of rain here) and feel for those who had so much loss. Farming is such a challenge. Try again...the world needs every farmer. We had wind damage with corn and staked crops blown over, and the lower flooded fields but haven't been planted in over 15 years (except for hay/straw) for the reason of never knowing when they will flood. We got our onion crop out and it is smaller, but we'll take it during this challenging season.

The fall crops are looking good, but need nice days to finish off. We just seeded lots of Asian greens for the winter high tunnels, and also seeded the Bridger onion from Johnny's, which performed well for us as an overwintered onion in low and high tunnels. The onion plants will be ready to transplant into the soil about December 1 and we will plant Forum onion sets (need to be special ordered for separate shipping via Johnny's very soon) the same time, as they did well also. The sets planted in late winter bolted in April. All were planted at a 4"x8" spacing for the most part, and we started harvest in late May as the storage onions ran out. We are battling diseases on many crops (cucurbits mostly) and the rains aren't helping. We look forward to a long, warm autumn and also to the 2012 season to start all over!

(Plainfield) Got off easy with the latest flood. High banks, sandy soils. Our road did not wash away this time, just. New wave of corn ear worm came in with the storm, hell on ripening red peppers. Diamondback moth wrecking very young mustard greens. Winter squash going down with powdery mildew, but nice crop finishing. Using up any fertilizer with Chilean nitrate. Greens all need it, and it is prohibited for next season for organic production. Give generously to the funds for farmer relief.

(Norwich) (editor's heads up – late blight reports are increasing around the state) Found late blight in my late potatoes at a field of ours on the Conn. River in North Thetford (Ely). Seems to have come from a single spore as it started in only one small place in the field. Treating with Oxidate etc, but will probably mow pretty soon. This has happened with us before and I'm partly to blame because I put in a very late planting and one out of three years get LB. Yes, Virginia, it really is late blight.... it stinks in that very special way.