



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – February 5, 2025
Compiled by Vern Grubinger, University of Vermont Extension
(802) 656-7534, vernon.grubinger@uvm.edu
<https://www.uvm.edu/extension/horticulture/commercial>

VVBGA WINTER GROWER WEBINARS

Wednesdays, noon-1:00 from February 5 - April 30. Free, via Zoom.

The full line up is at <https://go.uvm.edu/webinars2025>. All webinars are free, but you must pre-register at <https://go.uvm.edu/webinar-registration> to receive the link to join. Webinars will be recorded and posted at <https://www.youtube.com/@vvbga>, or listen on Spotify.

February 5. Refining greenhouse production for healthy transplants and retail sales.

Growers share strategies for growing healthy, profitable certified organic plant starts, including crop selection, fertility, watering, and work efficiencies. This webinar is supported by the Transition to Organic Partnership Program. Speakers: Jack Manix (Walker Farm, Dummerston), Andrew Knafel (Clearbrook Farm, Shaftsbury). Eli Hersh (Honeyfield Farm, Norwich).

February 12. Tips for improving high tunnel tomato yields. Have you ever wondered what an average yield for tunnel tomatoes is? Are you curious to know what other growers do for spacing, pruning, fertility, pest management, etc.? We'll share production benchmarks and simple things that could improve high tunnel yields. This webinar is supported by the Transition to Organic Partnership Program. Speakers: Andy Jones (Intervale Community Farm, Burlington), Christa Alexander (Jericho Settlers Farm, Jericho); Phoenix O'Brien (Hall Brook Farm, Thorndike, Maine).

February 19. Understanding the Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).

Did you know that basic NAP coverage is free to underserved farmers? That's beginning farmers, low-income farmers, people of Color, women and veterans. You can also buy up the coverage. Come learn how the program works, and how to get the most out of it if you ever need it. Speakers: Julie Jacque, (Farm Service Agency) Jacob Mills (McDonald Farmstand, Danville).

February 26. Allium pests! This webinar will focus on organic management of pests and diseases of onions, garlic, leeks. This webinar is supported by the Transition to Organic Partnership Program. Speakers: Ann Hazelrigg (UVM) and Christy Hoepfing (Cornell Cooperative Extension).

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Hinesburg) Winter greens production is down relative to the past few warmer Januarys. Disease is down too. Consistently cold makes it easier to focus on getting winter tasks done: 2024 financials done, 2025 financial projections done, seeding plan done, seed order done, field map done, CAPS plan done, VOF application done, Real Organic application done...but getting tired of desk work.

Feeling the need to have more tangible accomplishments. Thinking about microgreens, more hoophouses, and more storage crops for 2025. The dangers of winter boredom.

(Shrewsbury) A sunny January allowed just enough solar gain in our high tunnels to offset the freezing nights: we fully harvested our unheated tunnels by the end of 2024, and the cut greens look amazingly undamaged in their slow regrowth gearing up for March harvest.

For the previous three years, we've rented a soil steamer to control chickweed in our tunnels. This fall instead of steaming, we mulched all three tunnels with 2-3" of composted hardwood bark on the beds, and fresh bark in the pathways. Weed control is excellent, and the material also acts as a capillary break: our tunnels have been covered with 3 layers of row cover nonstop for the past 4 weeks, and with the gable vents always open, the covers are dry and plants are not suffering from excess humidity.

Since in our down-season I prefer skiing to moving row cover, this is a wonderful benefit. The downside? Moving row covers on and off the greens during their harvest season moves bits of bark on top of the greens, and slows down harvesting, washing, and packing a bit in order to sell clean produce. All in all, next year I'll put more composted bark on our tunnels rather than rent a steamer again.

Planning for next year involves trimming out parts of our production and distribution that are the most inefficient: planning to grow less unprofitable crops, freeing up capacity by diminishing labor-intensive distribution channels, and making plans to cut out some of the work that needs to happen during times of the year when we have had too many responsibilities to follow through on all of them effectively. And of course, trying a few new things for fun and curiosity. I love being able to make those decisions, and I'm amazed at the effectiveness of little improvements, aggregated over years.

(Burlington) The word of winter farming is low. Low light and low temperatures equal low growth. Easy to forget in recent years is that January can actually be cold and that has an impact on the growth rate of our unheated winter tunnels. We are well below our recent year's harvests and it will be a few weeks before we have much of anything to harvest. Fortunately, we are able to string together modest amounts of greens for the CSA each week since they hold well in the coolers. Root crops are holding well too and local wholesale is picking up for winter veggies.

Just kicked off our summer CSA signup last week and have good early response. I am nervously watching our numbers to see how enrollment goes after two years of major floods. While we lost a few more CSA members than usual last spring, overall we hit our summer CSA targets. We'll see about this year, though our 2024 summer CSA production turned out significantly better than our 2023 summer CSA share.

Looking forward to getting into unheated tunnel peppers in a bigger way this year, happy to hear any hot tips out there: andy@intervalecommunityfarm.com

(Guildhall) I've not reported the past few months, so I'll play catch up. Due to the summer flooding, we only had 30 acres of potatoes to harvest out of the 52 we planted. Knowing we'd have a smaller pile of potatoes than usual, we did not send any to the terminal and really pushed our grocery store outlets. Particularly our new 5# retail bags which are variety specific, with unique colors and UPCs/barcodes to make it easy for the retailer. Typically, we skip shipping for a few weeks in October so we can focus on harvesting, but with less acres to get thru we kept our standard market schedule, and added some days.

Selling strong in October left us in a good position to make the big Thanksgiving sales we sometimes miss. We needed those big orders and endcap displays this year. Watching the big repackers and Idaho crash the price of 5 lb. bags for Thanksgiving was disheartening though. I don't care how big you are, \$1.20 for 5 lb. (\$12.00 10x5 master) delivered is too cheap. I think everything in the supermarket has at least doubled over 2 years, except potatoes. I was also really underwhelmed by winter holiday sales this year. Most coops and grocery stores didn't order anything beyond a standard week.

Harvest went well. We harvested 966,000 lbs., down from our usual 1.3-1.6 mil lbs., but 8 of our 30 acres were reds, and they aren't a yielder. The whole crop (including the new potatoes) averaged 32,000 lbs. per acre; golds did 40,000 lbs. so yields per acre were down, but not disastrously so.

On the upside, the quality was the best ever. Zero hollow-heart in golds or russets. Only the early chippers had a problem with it. No scab anywhere this year. Some rhizoctonia on golds but not enough to matter. Boron, magnesium, and kelp foliar-fed this summer paid off.

Reds in the barn are now starting to look skin-wise. Dark Red Norland never stays nice late; I'd love to find a late storing red. Russets have a 95% pack out, it's incredible. I don't like them much to eat, but you're not throwing your money off the grading table with them, and customers like them.

Taxes are done, working on field plans and seed orders. We're switching to a 3-year rotation and not planting potatoes in fields prone to flooding anymore. Endless mechanical issues with trucks this winter keeps us busy: brakes, carbs, and fuel pumps.

We've still got beautiful golds and russets. If folks need them for farm stores or CSAs, please reach out. sparrowarcfarm@gmail.com

(Plainfield NH) We are continuing to convert the sides of the greenhouses to automatic roll ups to accommodate an aging work force. Tomatoes seeded, and focusing on ornamentals with perennial seeding beginning in earnest this week. Did I say loading the woodstove was a frequent activity?

(Argyle NY) All the best laid plans in the fall got thwarted by one of the coldest Januarys in 12 years. The tunnels looked picked over with not much regrowth in sight. If we get some sun in February things will look up as always. Sales have been strong, which has added to the picking down of all crops with the (wrong) anticipated thoughts that the weather will turn around.

The cold snap in December wreaked havoc on crops like chard that was growing so luxurious in the warm fall but not quite hardened off to take on 7-below even with supplemental heat that turns on at 24 degrees under the row covers. We are asking others but feel 28 is a better option for extended cold, cloudy days. Subsequent cold snaps in that range have slowed growth to a trickle with cloudy weather as a “drive it home” effect.

A lot of crops are growing nicely in the greenhouse to fill in gaps and add to the offerings soon. We seed flats or strip-trays of many greens on our radiant heat benches then flip them into the tunnels for an immediate bed that reduces the days to harvest.

We steamed most beds in the tunnels last fall so it’s been nice with reduced/no weeding. Plants generally healthy; they need spring warmth and more light but barn cleaning, seed ordering, maintenance, conferences, reading, traveling, are great fill-in tasks as we wait! Still looking for a key farm person going forward.

2025 VVBGA ANNUAL MEETING SLIDES AVAILABLE

Over 200 people attended! The slide presentations are posted at <https://go.uvm.edu/vvbga2025> Topics include Response to Flooding, Start Up Infrastructure, Cover Crops and Rotation, Organic IPM, Labor, Tracking Profitability, Blueberry Renovation, Strawberry Production, and a tour of Asian Vegetable Farms.

2024 NEW ENGLAND FRUIT AND VEG. CONFERENCE SLIDES AVAILABLE

Need more screen time? There is a lot of valuable information in the slides from 26 different sessions posted at <https://newenglandvfc.org/2024-presentations-and-proceedings/>

POLLINATOR SUPPORT REPORT

Laura Johnson, UVM Extension

Kindly fill out our 5-minute Pollinator Support Practices Survey. This anonymous [survey](#) will help inform our work to serve you better. We appreciate your input.

Purchasing bumble bees for your high tunnels or early spring crops? Consider requesting a queen excluder to help protect your native crop pollinators when you place your order for your box(es). See [this factsheet](#) we put together last year for more information.

SCALE TESTING AVAILABLE STATEWIDE IN APRIL

The Weights & Measures Section of the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets will host scale inspection events around the state during April for anyone who uses scale(s) at farmers’ markets or farm stands to sell produce or other commodities. Bring your legal-for-trade scale, and any accessories that you use with it, for weighing items for sale. **The testing and licensing of these scales is required by law.**

The test takes 5 to 10 minutes per scale. No appointment is needed. Look for the yellow “Scale Check Here” signs. Locations are listed at: <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/weights-measures>. If you need a license application form, click on “licensing” on the left-side menu. Questions? 802-828-2426 or Tucker.Diego@vermont.gov

WHAT ARE YOUR STRAWBERRY RESEARCH NEEDS?

UVM Extension’s Northwest Crops and Soils Team has a Specialty Crop Block Grant from the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets to study disease and pest pressure in strawberry production fields. We hope you can inform us about issues you face with your strawberry crops, to help us prioritize/focus our research and extension efforts. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey at: https://qualtrics.uvm.edu/jfe/form/SV_3IqfIOMK212rmmmy. Questions? Kellie.Damann@uvm.edu

CORN EARWORM IPM WEBINAR

February 11, 2025, 2:00 p.m. Eastern

Corn earworm is one of the most challenging ear feeding insect pests to manage in sweet corn and a regional team has formed to help develop IPM solutions. see <https://www.cewipm.org/>. This webinar will include update talks. The first will discuss effectively using baited traps for monitoring adult moths and the second will discuss the benefits of using these traps for managing corn earworm in a Virginia case study. Register at [this link](#). This webinar will be recorded for anyone unable to attend the live session.

NOFA-VT WINTER CONFERENCE FEBRUARY 15-16

This event will be held at UVM in Burlington. See <https://www.nofavt.org/events/nofa-vt-winter-conference>

VVBGA MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Don’t wait to get removed from the listserv! To renew (or join) go to <https://vvbga.org> and log in to your farm account or create a new account. Dues are \$75 per farm for 2025. If this fee is a barrier to participation, a lower payment can be selected, no questions asked. Commercial membership is \$125 per company or organization that serves farmers. Go to: <https://vvbga.org/commercial-membership>.