

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – January

(Dummerston) An ongoing battle with the voles in the high tunnel has me thinking back to the post-harvest conference presentations - would hardware cloth really keep them out or would they chew through plastic elsewhere? Spinach in a caterpillar tunnel is also a failed experiment because of voles – it's just not practical to crawl in there often enough to keep them in check. I'm thinking of taking on fewer winter CSA members next year (or none) and selling more at the winter farmers' market - more flexibility and less pressure to maintain a diverse mix of produce all winter. All kinds of ideas and tips from the conference: thinking of streamlining and cleaning up the wash area, planting annual ryegrass between plastic mulch, and using fans to dry garlic better for longer storage. Great ideas for weeding equipment and storage facilities too, but my wish list is now far bigger than my farm budget.

(Burlington) I had a great time at the VVBGA winter meetings. I came away with several interesting things to try in weed control, harvest, and storage realms. Haven't had quite enough sun or warmth to making timing spinach harvest out of our 14-foot tunnels easy, but the 32-footers will be a piece of cake, as they have only frozen occasionally. Wishing for snow, but happy to feel the longer days.

(Fairfax) Carrot washing is keeping us busy three days a week. Always nice having product to sell in Feb. and March. Quality is still quite good with little shrinkage but I know that will likely change once we get into March. Great conference in Fairlee. Always impressed at how innovative growers in Vermont are. I really enjoy hearing about what our growers are doing. Lots of great ideas to try and replicate on our farm.

(Westminster West) First seeds are coming up in plug trays and transplanting plugs into pots begins tomorrow. It feels like I haven't had a break at all this winter before it all starts again. Had a great VVGBA show in Fairlee last week. Meeting with buyers next week at my top accounts and if this year is as good as last year I will be happy.

(Harborside ME) Since there are more than enough summer growers in our area, we decided last spring to specialize in winter and only sell from September to May. Our one large non-moveable greenhouse which used to grow tomatoes, peppers and eggplants could therefore take the summer off. So we decided to solarize the soil in there by irrigating to wet the soil, laying down plastic on the soil from edge to edge, and shutting up the house from mid-July to mid-August. We used soil thermometers to make sure we hit 145 degrees F at the 2-inch depth. The result this winter is the most weed-free greenhouse I have ever experienced. Our other large greenhouses, all moveable, grew summer crops of sweet potatoes and paste tomatoes (which we freeze whole and sell at winter markets) but we are thinking now that they could be moved off those crops in mid-July (we would need to grow non-staking tomatoes) to solarize the next door plot that will be in winter crops.

We want to use solarization on our outdoor fields also before fall planted crops and so this summer we are planning on moving our cathedral greenhouses (three 14-foot wide sections make a 50-foot house) sideways progressively across a field (and hopefully only needing to leave them for two weeks so we could get three moves from July 7 to August 21.

(Little Compton RI) I received a number of emails about my listserv comment on ‘some’ evidence from growers that in 2014 that Entrust was not giving significant control of CPB on their potatoes. Someone said they had some success putting in beds of buckwheat as an insectary to pull in predators to do battle with CPB. They claimed that they got the idea from Eric Nordell one of the most respected organic growers in the Northeast. I then came across a Cornell study that said that the idea had marginal efficacy: http://rvpadmin.cce.cornell.edu/uploads/doc_39.pdf.

Other folks are working on getting Novodor (an older formula of Bt encapsulated in a UV resistant carrier) that we used to use, and it worked well. I understand MOFGA is communicating with the French manufacturer to see if they can get an inert ingredient replaced with something that the NOP can allow. Meanwhile I plan to try the buckwheat next summer – what’s not to like about having a good cover crop/insectary close at hand? At least our bees will be happy!

Starting our greenhouse tomatoes this week and the Maxiforts are as vigorous as ever! I will be starting them two days later than the scions for our April plantings. I am thinking of using Estimato f(in)v

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