

Vermont Vegetable and Berry News – February 17, 2015  
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## REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(Shelburne/South Burlington) Despite the warm Nov/Dec this stretch of well-below normal temperatures is going to make for interesting regrowth under the hoops. The kale, surprisingly, looks good. We will see how this coldest weather yet treats them. The spinach is more troubling looking. I am confident that any damaged leaves will just be removed and the plants will eventually regrow well, but it's hard to tell at this point. I have a lot more visual freeze damage than in years past. I am still not working beds yet. Usually I plant a new round of kale, lettuce, cilantro, escarole and other crops in a week! Not going to happen this year with these temperatures. Luckily we had a bountiful Nov. and Dec., and even beginning of January before things got so cold. I have been wondering what greenhouses in Massachusetts look like with all the snow. When I lived in Michigan, some areas of the state near the lake would get an accumulation of 4 to 6 feet of snow, and the hoophouses did just fine as long as the snow load was evenly spread out, so I have been curious to know how farms with greenhouses are handling the snow load. We are definitely appreciating the longer days, and even though it was still quite cold, the sun in the last few days was able to warm up the houses enough to slough off the 3 to 6 inches of snow that had built up on the houses after that freak sleet/rain we had (even though air temperatures were only about 3 degrees!). The sleet had created a nice ice layer on the houses and then the next snowfall all stuck right on. Happy to see it slide off on its own!

(Huntington) Local wholesale markets have been steady. It seemed like there was a whole lot of product put up on many farms going into winter, but it seems to be moving at this point. Winter farmers' markets have been somewhat disappointing in 2015, but below-zero temperatures on those Saturdays probably hasn't helped casual foot traffic. Plowing in semi-weekly 2 degree snow storms has me dreaming of a cab on the utility tractor, but I take as consolation that this wasn't the winter we dove head-first into winter greens production. We're nearing the end of an insulation project in our shop, so that is a pretty good bet that a warm-up is imminent. We will be clearing out a room in the storage barn in the next two weeks to take advantage of the radiant floor to germinate our onion flats prior to turning on the greenhouse. We started doing that last year and had germination in 4 days on a 75-degree slab.





Our heat systems and greenhouse designs are just not a match to the slings and arrows of this season's storms! Next season we will insulate some benches with 1.5 inches of styrofoam, put hydronic heat mats down and top it off with some electric conduit ribs covered with Agribon 30 so in effect we will have mini greenhouses. Our goal is to keep everything warm and not worry about the overall air temperature of the entire house. Regarding grafting, a big lesson this year was to consider the extra drying effect of the continuous bottom heat needed to keep them warm. Our plugs were not growing because the bottoms of the plug cells got too dry for root growth. So for the last couple of weeks we've watered everything very thoroughly, then we push up random plugs to be sure the water got down to the bottom. Not having a well-rooted Maxifort plug probably led to failure of some grafts. Another wakeup call was finding out our Therm-alarm unit had slight oxidation on the contacts. One we checked had been in place 12 years and wasn't working. We took some emery cloth and a touch of vinegar to clean them up; another idea is to get a tube of some anti-oxidation lubricant that electricians use when setting up an electric panel in a moist environment...like a greenhouse!

(Argyle NY) This winter is bearing down hard. Our winter greens production in our unheated houses has been minimal, though I noticed the spinach under one layer of row cover has started to grow again. May be some harvest this week. Our two tunnels with underground heat had less than usual production in January, due to lack of sun in Dec. and first two weeks of Jan., but with more sunny days production is almost back to market demand now. Starting to clean up beds and replant the first fall plantings now. With heated soil emergence is about a week at mid-Feb. light levels. With our minimally heated soils, production is more about sunlight levels than outdoor temperature. Lately, this is the only time of year we can retail a significant amount of salad greens. I have noticed a falling off of demand for greens at our farmers' market due I think to f