



Vermont Vegetable and Berry News –September 9, 2019
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REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

(S. Burlington/Shelburne) We've continued to have our best tomato year yet, best varieties have been Pink Beauty, Valencia, Speckled Roma, and Sungolds (of course). We have many of our winter crops seeded or planted and so far have had the lightest pest pressure (Swede midge, imported cabbage moth and flea beetle) in at least 5 years. Hope they continue to stay away. We are experimenting with different successions of our mature kale, (including keeping our late summer kale to overwinter, something we tried last winter with good success). Still need to get a high tunnel skinned, been putting it off for a while now, at least the tunnel soil has sufficiently flushed!

(Charlotte) This year was a bumper crop for the blueberries, and they were strong up until last week. We tried sunflowers this year, and they went over very well, so this is something to continue next year. Our first year of peach production, and that went over very well. We have 4 different varieties, and the last variety is still going! The red raspberries didn't do well this year, so it is time to move the field into a new one we have been prepping. Pumpkins are growing nicely, and we should have enough for our farm stand this year. Our customers are really interested in what varieties we carry, so maybe more signs stating that in the fields.

(Pownal) End of season clean up in blueberries. Preparing rows for the off seasons. Will mulch once again in the spring hoping to remove any mummyberry sources. Lost 4 blueberry rows to Mummy Berry this year that were our biggest producers. Hoping the four rows will return to good production next year. Very poor year in raspberries as well. We are hoping for a good pumpkin season.

(Burlington) We look to have a solid fall ahead. So happy to have some rain to get our late summer cover crops going, now we just need to get more of them in the ground before we miss our windows for oats and vetch. 'Obsession' basil, out of Rutgers downy-mildew resistant basil breeding program, has been the star new cultivar this year. I can't think of the last time we've had next to zero DM at this point; usually our basil is a disaster by now from DM.

New Tilmor finger weeders were a big help in the weed department this year, and our packing line flow improved significantly when we added more casters, more tables, and more carts for moving things around. Concrete floors and good drainage make nearly everything seem possible.

Looks like we will make our tunnel cucumbers last through September, after a recent rebound possibly related to fertigation. That said, we've had our first real case of powdery mildew in the cucumbers, and hope that our weekly sprays of potassium bicarbonate keep it in check long enough to get us through the month.

(Craftsbury) With a later than usual start, we never caught up with our average number of days open but we did exceed the number of customers and produced a healthy and plentiful blueberry crop which was just shy of our strong season in 2018. Our year ended on August 29 after a two-day glean involving children from four local elementary schools. This is a nice way to get children out to see where berries are sourced and fill freezers in their schools' kitchens. We donate the berries and well-supervised children provide the labor. We teamed up for the first time with a newly formed 4-H Club in Craftsbury. We came up with a project for the members involving picking and delivering berries to elders in our community. Again, we provided the berries and list of folks who can no longer come to our place and the 4-H'ers got to meet and connect with people they might never have gotten to know. We will definitely do this again next year. We now turn our efforts to servicing our machinery, doing a final mowing and sprucing up the bushes--after the beauty of foliage season.

(Plainfield NH) Much needed water has arrived on our farm. A timely rain has such an emotional as well as agronomic positive impact on farms. Irrigation is a dreaded insurance policy, and nowhere near as beneficial or efficacious as a good slow 1/2" of rain. Monitoring CEW and watching for SWD in fall raspberries and not seeing much of that, probably because the cooler temps have slowed the lifecycle to where we can keep up with it. We are pretty much in harvest mode full time as picking raspberries and cherry tomatoes is slow business.

Both wholesale and retail remain strong. Along with tucking in cover crops when space is available I have been spot spraying perennial weeds (dock, bindweed, pokeweed, Virginia creeper) in the blueberry beds and trying to get the beds back to the shape they were in prior to netting. Tucked in 3000 strawberry plug plants in the recent rain. Burned down the potato tops on all varieties except the Russets, which are almost ready to do.

Potatoes bulked up pretty well considering the drought and the pumpkins and winter squash look good, as the PM has been kept in check with either cooperative conditions or a few fungicide applications. Onions are in and they are a meager crop; we were beset with wireworms, of all things, post-transplant and we lost 60 percent of the crop. Still need to prune out raspberries and make a stab at serious blueberry pruning, but that's on the wish list for winter.

(Argyle NY) The relief of cooler temps and drier days make fall such a great time. The summer was dry for the most part but some late downpours are not always welcome for erosion purposes and germinating of seeds (like spinach). Weed control, flea beetles, leaf hoppers, and powdery mildew have been our battle for much of the summer with successes on both sides. Using tarps and flaming have been successful for weed control when timed right, and using straw mulch of course is best.

Potatoes are slowly going down after good control of leafhoppers with Surround and Pyganic. Sizes of new potatoes being dug are great with our new system of 4" spacing. Summer squashes have succumbed to powdery mildew and old age, and successive plantings always seem like a good plan. Winter squash is looking great, going down slowly and will be harvested soon. Alternaria is making its worst show in years and is going to effect the fall cabbage. Hot water treating has typically controlled it well but maybe not this year.

Greens are welcoming the cooler temps and demand at the farmers' markets continue to be high. Making plans for the three high tunnels to be planted for winter, which makes for a busy September. Buckwheat in one tunnel will be tilled in soon with seeding to start in a few weeks. Overwintered onions continue to be a huge success (low tunnels and in the field) and we seeded most this week. Forum sets will be coming the end of the month. Still lots of work for harvesting fall crops and planting in winter tunnels. No rest for the weary farmers!

WHY ARE SOME SUMMER RASPBERRIES FLOWERING NOW?

I got this question from several growers around the state so I asked Marvin Pritts at Cornell and he replied "All raspberries have the capacity to flower in the fall - it's just that under normal conditions they don't have time to grow as tall as they need for this process to initiate. So they fruit in summer only. But under good growing conditions (lots of moisture, cooler temperatures) some raspberry varieties that normally would not reach the point where they produce fall flowers, will do so. I suspect that's what you're probably seeing - just the opposite of stress!

WHY DO MY TUNNEL TOMATOES HAVE A WHITE CORE?

From Univ. Missouri Extension:

Under stressful conditions, tomato fruit often develop a tough, white core in their center. The white tissue might be expressed only in the area of the fruit just beneath the calyx or, in extreme cases, through the entire depth of the fruit. The internal walls of the fruit may also appear pale in color and "corky". Older varieties with five distinct cavities (locules) filled with seeds are especially prone to this disorder. Newer, "beef steak" types have multiple locules and tend to show white core less often. Excessive heat and improper fertility seem to be related to the formation of white core. Malnourished plants with poor foliage cover tend to bear fruit exposed to the sun, thus adding to the problem of temperature stress of the fruit. As with yellow shoulder, insufficient tissue potassium levels have been associated with white core development.

AG ENGINEERING TECH TIPS

There are many, many ways to ventilate a protected tunnels and greenhouses, and opportunities for improvement abound, see Chris Callahan's latest blog post on Ventilation in Greenhouses and High Tunnels at: <http://go.uvm.edu/tunnelventilation>

POTATO HARVEST, CURING, STORAGE

From Univ. Nebraska Extension. For more detailed information, see the article in the Aug. 15 UMass Vegetable Notes at: <https://ag.umass.edu/vegetable/newsletters>

Potatoes should be harvested after the vines have died and the crop is mature. If the skins on the tubers are thin and rub off easily, the crop is not fully mature and will not store well. Wait until the skins remain firmly attached to the tubers. When harvesting potatoes, avoid bruising, skinning, or cutting the tubers. Before placing into storage, the tubers should be cured at 45 to 60 degrees F and relative humidity of 85 to 95% for two weeks to heal minor cuts and bruises and thicken the skin.

Once cured, sort and discard any soft, shriveled, or blemished tubers. before storing at 40 to 45 degrees F and relative humidity of 90 percent in the dark. If temperatures exceed 45 degrees, the potatoes will start to sprout after two or three months. When stored below 40 degrees, potatoes develop a sugary taste, which can be reduced by placing them at room temperature for a few days. Do not allow potatoes to freeze.

NOFA-VT LAUNCHES FARM BEGINNINGS®

This yearlong program is designed to help participants launch or grow their farm businesses. The course will include 8 business-planning sessions in the fall and winter taught by Vermont service providers and farmers, one-on-one mentorship with an experienced farmer, and a series of on-farm workshops in the summer. This is a nationally recognized curriculum, used by 13 other organizations across the country, adapted to meet the needs in Vermont. Since 1996, hundreds of farmers have participated in the program and 80% of Farm Beginnings graduates are still farming. To learn more and access the application, visit <https://nofavt.org/programs/farmer-services/farm-beginnings> or contact Jaime Silverstein at jaime@nofavt.org, 802-448-5649

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS AND TRAININGS

September 25, 3-6 pm. Custom-built wash/pack shed, tunnel tomatoes, living walkways and more at Mighty Food Farm, Shaftsbury VT. VVBGA members free, \$10 others. More details can be seen on the facebook event page <https://www.facebook.com/events/594335614377946/>

October 1, 3-6:30 pm, Improving Soil Health: Mixed Vegetables and Cut Flowers at Elmer Farm, E. Middlebury VT. Farmers: free; Non-farmers: \$15 to cover cost of dinner. <https://nofavt.org/events/exploring-practices-policies-improving-soil-health-series-middlebury>

October 16, 3-6 pm. Tunnel crops, wash/pack shed retrofit in old barn and more at Deep Meadow Farm, Windsor VT. VVBGA members free, \$10 others.

November 6, 2-5 pm. Off the grid, small-scale diversified vegetables and reduced tillage at Small Axe Farm, Barnet VT. VVBGA members free, \$10 others.

December 10-12. New England Vegetable and Fruit Conference and Trade Show. Manchester NH. <https://newenglandvfc.org/>

January 27, 2020. VVBGA Annual Meeting, Fairlee VT. Mark your calendars.