

VERMONT VEGETABLE AND BERRY GROWER NEWS July 2, 2021

(Plainfield NH) Almost the end of strawberry season that has been pretty good. Fruit size held up and the plants look robust, in part because I pulse-fed nitrogen early in the season. The downside of keeping the plants vigorous during fruit load is a little softness and fruit rot, which given the dryness of the season would seem unlikely. But if the plants struggle and collapse under fruit load, that is not desirable: been there, done that. So we are trying to find the delicate balance. We have also found that plants that remain vigorous during the bearing season seem a lot less prone to leaf spot diseases, and are easier to renovate.

We wrapped up another great bedding plant season, with continued high demand, like last year, and retail sales that have completely cleaned us out. Not sure if this is a new normal, but we will gladly take it while it happens. CSA numbers again were good and we sold out this year; we just completed week 3. Lots of tomatoes, squash and cukes as well as greens and broccoli for the retail and CSA boxes.

A shorthanded field crew without a few stalwart collegians who moved on has left us scrambling, so we applied for 2 additional H2A Jamaicans for mid-July. Fortunately, these guys are seasoned professionals whom are getting an unimaginable amount of tasks completed. Our weed control has suffered a bit, but hopefully we can get caught up in the short time between strawberry wholesaling and blueberry harvest. We hope to be able to let the crew catch a little bit of breath before launching into blueberry season.

Blueberry crop looks fair, lots of winter injury and not sure why. We got our 2020 fertilizing program completed before July last year, and the plants looked good going into the winter. New growth looks good this year. Maybe we just are not giving them the moisture they want, because our happiest plants seem to be in the damper parts of the field. There is significant pressure from quackgrass; certainly room for improvement in our management.

Overall crops look good given the heat and drought. Irrigating all we can, when we can. We have been saved by some timely showers. We need a good rain for the plants and water table, we can't depend on lucky showers to get us into the fall without some real crop loss.

STAY SAFE IN THUNDERSTORMS

With all the lightning this time of year, please remember to have a plan to keep your crew, family and animals safe on the farm. Here is some guidance from Univ. of Florida Extension: <https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/family-resources/lightning-safety/>

“Anyone engaged in outdoor work or activities should stop as soon as he or she hears the first rumble of thunder and move to a safe location. Do not come back outside and resume activities until 30 minutes after hearing the last roll of thunder. Safe: Fully enclosed building with a roof, walls, and floor or a fully enclosed, metal-top vehicle. Unsafe: picnic shelters, pavilions, tents (any kind), dugouts, greenhouses, carports or open garages; convertibles, bicycles, motorcycles, golf carts, boats without cabins.”

UPDATES FROM UVM EXTENSION AG ENGINEERING

Chris Callahan and Andy Chamberlin

Beat the Heat - Tunnels hot? Trying to cure onions or garlic? It's hot. Check out our reminders on improving ventilation (not just air circulation) at <http://go.uvm.edu/tunnelventilation>. Struggling with getting field heat out of harvested crops? Check out our simple and inexpensive plans for pallet and sub-pallet scale forced air coolers that turn walk-in coolers into precoolers at <http://go.uvm.edu/forcedaircooling>. Also useful for accelerating curing.

Cleaning Tools. Andy recently completed an in-depth review of Vikan/Remco cleaning tools specifically designed for use in food applications. They're easier to clean which will help keep your produce and food contact surfaces clean. Video at <https://youtu.be/tY7o9F1bC5w>

Concrete Repairs. Chris has been chipping away at some best practices for repairing cracked and pitted concrete floors. Short video series with step-by-step instructions available at <http://go.uvm.edu/concret crack videos>

SOIL HEATH UPDATES

Becky Maden, UVM Extension

Summer Nitrogen Management:

