



UMass
Extension

Vegetable Notes

For Vegetable Farmers in Massachusetts since 1975



Volume 32, Number 6

April 16, 2020

IN THIS ISSUE:

Crop Conditions
Pest Alert
Announcing New Weekly Virtual Twilight Meetings
Cultivating Relationships with Policymakers
News
Events
Sponsors

CROP CONDITIONS

Life on the farm is busier than ever, with all the usual spring tasks of seeding in the greenhouse and field, prepping beds, transplanting, harvesting greens, and putting out the first tomato plants into high tunnels and greenhouses. The storm on Tuesday brought 1-2 inches of rain to most of the state but also 70 mile-an-hour winds, which made extra work on many farms where plastic ripped off of greenhouses, tunnels and caterpillars. On top of that, sales continue to be higher than usual, and the extra labor needed to accommodate online ordering, delivery, and curbside pickup models has folks scrambling.

With all this activity, and as farm crews start to grow in size, a lot of you are wondering how to manage crew safety in light of COVID-19. How do I keep myself and my crew safe? How do we practically maintain safe distances? And what guidance is there on when masks should be worn and how often they should be changed or laundered? Policies can go a long way towards making things feel manageable and quieting some of these fears

- Develop a clear policy about when workers should wear masks and make sure everyone is fully aware of and comfortable with the policy.
- Use signage around the farm to remind employees when they should wash their hands or use a mask.
- The CDC is recommending cloth masks be used when social distancing measures are difficult to maintain, or in areas of high person-to-person contact, like in retail stores or farmer's markets. It may be feasible to work outdoors without a mask when employees are not in close to each other, but masks should be worn when riding in vehicles together or packing produce in a tight indoor space.
- Masks need to cover the wearer's mouth *and* nose to be effective.
- Remember that cloth masks should be laundered regularly (daily if possible), so having multiple masks per employee may be helpful.
- Avoid adjusting masks while they're on and touching the mouth-covering area, and wash your hands before putting the mask on, after taking it off, and after any adjustments. Touching the cloth means now the germs are on your hands and therefore need to be washed.
- Identify high-touch surfaces (harvest totes, shared tools, phones, scales, cash registers, etc) and develop, print out, and clearly display SOPs for how to clean and/or disinfect these items.



Posters like this one are available in many different languages from the CDC. [Click here to view printable posters.](https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2020/s0416-covid-19-posters.html)

The most important ways to keep yourself and others safe are to cover your cough, avoid touching your face, and wash your hands well and regularly, especially after touching frequently touched surfaces. Gloves can be useful but are essentially just another surface and need to be washed or changed as often as you would be washing your hands, otherwise they can spread the virus or other germs just as easily as a bare hand.

For more reading, posters and other signage you can print and hang, check out the resources below, which are also available on [our COVID-19 website](#):

- [MDAR Guidance for Farmers' Markets, Farm Stands, and CSAs](#)
- [Safe Operating Guidance for Small Farm Businesses During COVID-19](#) (WA State Dept of Ag)
- [CDC Posters](#), including Stop the Spread of Germs and Symptoms of COVID-19 in multiple languages

PEST ALERT: ANT DAMAGE IN TRANSPLANTS

We've heard reports from other New England states this spring of ants causing feeding damage on brassica transplants, eating away the fine roots and girdling stems. This is something we see every once in a while but is fairly unusual. We have a report of this happening in tomato from a few years ago as well. Gerald Brust of the University of Maryland has written [here](#): I have seen controls [for ants in transplants] such as diatomaceous earth, mixtures of garlic and hot pepper, drenches of pyrethrums, boiling water poured onto the soil, and others, but none work very well if at all." Remember also that any pesticide application method must be on-label.

There are many potential causes of transplant failure in the field—soil-dwelling root rot fungi, [cutworms](#), [cabbage root maggot](#) or [seed corn maggot](#)—so take the time to dig up some plants and search for the “root” cause (sorry, couldn't help myself!). Cabbage root maggot and seed corn maggots aren't doing damage yet, but adult flights usually begin within the next few weeks. If you have transplants going down in the field and you don't know why, feel free to send us pictures at umassveg@umass.edu or leave us a message at (413) 577-3976.



*Brassicas with root and stem damage from ants.
Photo: A. Radin*

ANNOUNCING NEW WEEKLY VIRTUAL TWILIGHT MEETINGS FOR COMMERCIAL VEGETABLE GROWERS

Join us each Wednesday at 3pm for a virtual mini-Twilight Meeting! Each week we will have a topic lined up for demonstration and discussion, with a presentation of new information on crop, pest, and farm management topics followed by plenty of time for Q&A about the topic at hand, and farmer-to-farmer discussion of the issues of the week. Farmers can join by phone or by computer—those who join by computer will be able to see some shared photos and presentations. This is a new program that we hope will allow us to connect with growers while we are not able to physically visit farms for routine scouting and assistance. It is intended for our commercial farmers and will cover topics relevant to small and large scale farm businesses and conventional and organic production systems.

How to join: [Click here to register and receive the sign-in information.](#)

Upcoming Topics:

- **April 22: Early-season pest scouting.**
Be prepared for what's coming, or what's already here!
- **April 29: COVID-19 business relief**
Learn about the different programs and how to apply featuring guest speakers TBA
- **May 6: Organic insect pest management**
With a few key, perennial pests and just a few OMRI-approved insecticides to choose from, we will present a

simple season-long primer!

Check the [Vegetable Program Event page](#) and keep an eye out in *Veg Notes* for new upcoming topics

CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS WITH POLICY-MAKERS

--Written by Winton Pitcoff, Director, MA Food System Collaborative

[Note from the UMass Vegetable Program: Growers often ask us how they can get involved in advocating for agricultural issues that they care about at the state level, and because we are not involved in policymaking or advocacy, we are very thankful to Winton for contributing this thoughtful article.]

Farming means being ready for anything. Responding to the weather. Adjusting to changes in markets. Adapting to new management techniques. No two days are the same as you assess the circumstances in front of you and modify what you do in order to produce a successful crop.

Perhaps less visible, but often just as important to that success, are the public policies that underlie all of the factors that impact your operation. Laws that regulate waste and pollution have an effect on climate change and the weather. Regulations about food safety dictate management practices that can cost you time and money. Public investments in protecting farmland impact the availability and prices of land. Support for science and education can mean research results that help increase crop yields.

The process by which these policies are created can seem inscrutable, or like an unnecessary distraction. Adjusting soil nutrients or building a hoop house certainly may feel like a better use of your time, with more immediate and tangible results. But taking some time to provide input into the policies that govern so much of how farming is regulated and supported can result in systemic change that supports you and other farmers over the long term.

That input doesn't mean coming up with brilliant new ideas yourself, and you don't need to understand how the policy process works in order to play a role. All you need is experience as a farmer, goals for success, and ideas about how you might achieve those goals.

Policymakers and their staff are experts in turning what they learn from their constituents into actionable policy. But legislators are responsible for so much — from health care to transportation to education, and everything in between — and they can't be experts in everything. That's why your role in the policy process is critical. You are an educator, providing them with the information they need to make supportive choices when given the opportunity to do so.

Getting to know your state representative and senator is the first step. These are the people who represent you in the Massachusetts legislature, and who can propose and support measures that help farmers. You can find out who your legislators are, and get their contact information, here: <https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator>

The best way to build a connection with your legislator is to invite them to your farm for a tour. Talk them through what

CONTACT US:

Contact the UMass Extension Vegetable Program with your farm-related questions, any time of the year. We always do our best to respond to all inquiries.

Office phone: (413) 577-3976 *We are currently working remotely but checking these messages daily, so please leave us a message!*

Email: umassveg@umass.edu

Home Gardeners: Please contact the UMass GreenInfo Help Line with home gardening and homesteading questions, at greeninfo@umext.umass.edu.

UMass Extension services update:

As you are probably aware, operations at the University of Massachusetts Amherst have been significantly reduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, MA and University policy have the effect of temporarily suspending most of the on-campus services that we provide until further notice, including:

- Soil & Plant Nutrient Testing
- Plant Disease Diagnostics
- Hot Water Seed Treatment
- Nematode Analysis
- Weed, Insect, Turfgrass, and Invasive Plant Identification
- Public access to all farm properties

Until further notice, please do not send or deliver samples to campus, as we cannot process them.

In addition, all in-person UMass Extension events scheduled at least through May 15 have been canceled or postponed.

it takes to produce a crop, and to get it to market. Tell them about economic challenges, like land and input prices, about issues you might have around labor or needs you have for other resources like technical assistance or marketing help. Explain what your goals are for your farm and what the barriers are to your sustainability or growth. By all means, mention any laws or regulations that are of concern to you, but you don't have to have that specific information in order to tell your story effectively.

If an on-farm visit won't work, there are plenty of other opportunities for getting to know your legislator. Most of them have regular office hours in their district, where you can stop in and talk with them. You can visit them in Boston at their office in the State House, if that's convenient for you, or even attend hearings where you can testify on specific pieces of legislation. And you can always call or send an email if there's an issue you want to raise immediately.

No matter the setting, keep a few things in mind during your conversation:

Be polite. This sounds obvious, but it's often instinctive to think of officials as obstacles and to be combative. They certainly need to hear when change is needed, but thinking of them as potential allies who are willing to learn is usually the best strategy for communication.

Tell stories. Legislators deal with lots of facts and figures, but the stories are often what stick with them the most and can have a great impact on their perspective about an issue.

Listen. Remember that they are learning from you, and may have questions that seem obvious, or even irrelevant. Be patient and answer their questions clearly. If they ask a question you don't have an answer for, it's fine to say so and offer to find an answer and follow up with them. Just make sure to do that, later!

Know your audience. The state has some level of oversight over agriculture, but local authorities and the federal government do as well. If you are asking for something specific, first make sure it's something under the control of the person you're speaking with.

Be positive. Don't ignore or avoid talking about challenges, but do let your enthusiasm show for what it is you do, and what it is you're working toward. Tell them what success would look like for your farm, and how you plan to get there.

Follow up. Send them a quick email after your conversation with them, whether it was on your farm or in their office, thanking them for their time and reminding them that you're available as a resource. If you made a specific ask of them while you were talking, reiterate that request.

Don't be discouraged if you end up spending more time talking with staff than with the legislator themselves. Legislative staff have a great deal of knowledge about how the system works and a lot of influence when it comes to setting priorities for lawmakers.

In building this relationship, you're establishing yourself as a trusted source for your legislator. Later, when you hear about a bill or budget item under consideration that you want them to support or oppose, they'll remember you and will value your input. You may even find that they check in with you about something you weren't even aware was happening, to get your thoughts on how they should proceed.

Of course, there is also strength in numbers, and Massachusetts has many great organizations working to promote supportive agricultural policy. The [MA Food System Collaborative](#), the [Buy Local organizations](#), [Farm Bureau](#), and other groups all have strong relationships with policymakers and work hard to advocate for bills and budget items each year, taking their cues from the farmers who are part of their networks. Joining one of these organizations is another great way to ensure that your voice is heard.

Policy that hurts farmers doesn't happen by accident. It happens because farmers weren't at the table when decisions were being made, leaving other interests with a clearer path to getting their needs met. By developing relationships with legislators, farmers can help ensure that future policy decisions are made with the needs of agriculture in mind.

For a more in-depth look at the Massachusetts state policy process and how to effectively advocate for changes, see [Cultivating Good Food Policy: A guide to advocacy campaigns for Massachusetts food system stakeholders](#).

News

UMASS EXTENSION FRUIT PROGRAM – REMOTE TWILIGHT MEETING RECORDING

The UMass Extension Fruit Program hosted a Twilight Meeting last week and, for those who weren't able to attend, videos from the meeting are now posted on the [Fruit Program's new YouTube channel](#).

MDAR TOOL: CSA-PRODUCER MATCH SPREADSHEET

With the increased public demand for CSAs, MDAR is launching a pilot project to match CSA farms with additional crops and products. As a CSA farmer or farmstand operator, have you thought about expanding your offerings with other crops or value added products? Or are you a value added producer or farmer looking for alternative marketing outlets for your products? If so, [MDAR's CSA-Producer Match Spreadsheet](#) can help you match up your needs with other value-added producers or food businesses.

We encourage businesses to fill out the CSA market match spreadsheet. The spreadsheet has tabs at the bottom, "CSA Farmers Seeking Products", "Value added Producers Seeking CSA Partners". We will keep the link live as a bulletin board, so you may come back for updated listings and posts.

Questions, contact Richard.LeBlanc@mass.gov or Rebecca.Davidson@mass.gov.

FARM TO INSTITUTE NEW ENGLAND TOOL: MATCHING NEEDS & SURPLUS

Farm to Institution New England (FINE) has also created a spreadsheet that matches up gaps and surplus in the New England institutional food system. They welcome anyone to add, view or contact others on the list directly. Examples of listings may include:

- Those with a surplus of food that need a home (e.g. meat, seafood, vegetables, dairy, processed foods)
- Those looking for local food to serve to displaced constituents
- Those with a need for extra hands at their facilities (e.g. milkers, kitchen staff, drivers)
- Those looking for job opportunities after their institution has closed or reduced labor
- Those with additional storage space for food that needs to be preserved

Post your information on [FINE's spreadsheet here](#).

MDAR TOOL: LIST OF FARMERS' MARKETS SEEKING VENDORS

MDAR posts an updated list of new and existing farmers markets looking for vendors here: www.mass.gov/media/1387246/download. Bookmark this link as it is updated often. The contacts for all the markets are posted [here](#). MassGrown map of farmers markets [here](#).

H-2A UPDATE: Dept of Homeland Security To Temporarily Amend Certain H-2A Requirements During COVID-19 National Emergency

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), with the support of the USDA, has announced a temporary final rule to change certain H-2A requirements to help U.S. agricultural employers avoid disruptions in lawful agricultural-related employment, protect the nation's food supply chain, and lessen impacts from the coronavirus (COVID-19) public health emergency. These temporary flexibilities will not weaken or eliminate protections for U.S. workers.

Under this temporary final rule, an H-2A petitioner with a valid temporary labor certification who is concerned that workers will be unable to enter the country due to travel restrictions can start employing certain foreign workers who are currently in H-2A status in the United States immediately after United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) receives the H-2A petition, but no earlier than the start date of employment listed on the petition. To take advantage of this time-limited change in regulatory requirements, the H-2A worker seeking to change employers must

already be in the United States and in valid H-2A status.

Additionally, USCIS is temporarily amending its regulations to protect the country's food supply chain by allowing H-2A workers to stay beyond the three-year maximum allowable period of stay in the United States. These temporary changes will encourage and facilitate the continued lawful employment of foreign temporary and seasonal agricultural workers during the COVID-19 national emergency. Agricultural employers should utilize this streamlined process if they are concerned with their ability to bring in the temporary workers who were previously authorized to work for the employer in H-2A classification. At no point is it acceptable for employers to hire illegal aliens.

The temporary final rule is effective immediately upon publication in the Federal Register. If the new petition is approved, the H-2A worker will be able to stay in the United States for a period of time not to exceed the validity period of the Temporary Labor Certification. DHS will issue a new temporary final rule in the Federal Register to amend the termination date of these new procedures in the event DHS determines that circumstances demonstrate a continued need for the temporary changes to the H-2A regulations.

The H-2A nonimmigrant classification applies to alien workers seeking to perform agricultural labor or services of a temporary or seasonal nature in the United States, usually lasting no longer than one year, for which able, willing, and qualified U.S. workers are not available.

[View the complete press release here.](#)

APPLICATION DEADLINES EXTENDED FOR MDAR GRANT PROGRAMS

Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture (MEGA) Program: Applicants that have not yet filed 2019 taxes for their farm business may provide 2019 income and expense estimates with the application, and then submit a copy of relevant tax form to the Department by July 29, 2020. The MEGA application deadline has been extended to 4:00 pm on April 20, 2020. For a copy of the amended Request for Response with application, please visit the MEGA website at: www.mass.gov/service-details/matching-enterprise-grants-for-agriculture-mega

Agricultural Produce Safety Improvement Program (APSIP): The APSIP application deadline has been extended from Friday, May 8, 2020 to Friday, June 19, 2020. Applications must be received by the Department no later than 4:00 pm on Friday, June 19, 2020. [Please visit the APSIP for more information and a copy of the application.](#)

MDAR's New Climate Smart Agriculture Program (CSAP): The CSAP application deadline has been extended from Friday, May 8, 2020 to Friday, June 19, 2020. Applications must be received by the Department no later than 4:00 pm on Friday, June 19, 2020. [Please visit the CSAP website for more information and a copy of the application.](#)

SARE COVER CROP SURVEY

After decades of research, cover crops have been widely shown to be beneficial to crop yields, soil health, and farmers' bottom lines. However, many obstacles to cover crop adoption still remain, including start-up costs and the amount of time before benefits are seen. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education](#) (SARE) program – one of the most significant drivers of research on conservation practices like cover crops – is now circulating their sixth national cover crop survey to better understand why and how farmers use cover crops, and why some don't. SARE is conducting the 2020 Cover Crop Survey in partnership with the [Conservation Technology Information Center](#) (CTIC) and the [American Seed Trade Association](#) (ASTA). **Farmers have until April 12, 2020 to participate in the survey, which can be completed online here: <https://bit.ly/CCSurvey2020>.** The survey only takes about 10-15 minutes to complete and participants who fill out the survey can **enter a drawing for Visa gift cards worth \$100 and \$200.**

EVENTS

WEEKLY MDAR AND MA FARM BUREAU COVID-19 RESPONSE BRIEFING CONFERENCE CALL

On Monday March 23, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources and Farm Bureau held a joint conference call for farmers on COVID-19. The purpose of the call was to review various policies related to the COVID-19 response, to answer questions, and to take suggestions.

For the immediate future, we have decided to make this call a weekly event. The call will tentatively occur each Monday at 1 pm.

The call is open to all farmers. Call in information is as follows:

Mondays, 1 pm - Note that circumstances may dictate that the day or time may need to be rescheduled. If a change of day or time is necessary, Farm Bureau will send out notice via email to Regular Members.

Call In Number: 605-475-3235

Participant Code: 572085#

Please be sure your phone is muted during the call, except when speaking.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!



Become a sponsor!

Vegetable Notes. Genevieve Higgins, Lisa McKeag, Susan Scheufele, co-editors.

Where trade names or commercial products are used, no company or product endorsement is implied or intended. Always read the label before using any pesticide. The label is the legal document for product use. Disregard any information in this newsletter if it is in conflict with the label.

The University of Massachusetts Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer, United States Department of Agriculture cooperating. Contact your local Extension office for information on disability accommodations. Contact the State Center Directors Office if you have concerns related to discrimination, 413-545-4800.