In the field: Things to pay attention to...

It’s awfully easy to find beet leafminer eggs, and mining damage is beginning to show up as well. An anecdotal observation: the larger the leaf, the greater the chance that there are eggs or mining damage. If you have flats of chard or beets in your greenhouse, check the leaves for eggs before setting out—cause what would be the point of that? For organic growers that reliably have this pest, row covers may need to be put on as soon as seeds germinate or right after transplanting. Check the New England Vegetable Management Guide for control options—several if you are not growing organically. For organic, the really only effective product is Spinosad, which can be applied when eggs are seen, with a second application 7 to 10 days later.

All those cabbage butterflies you’ve been seeing for a few weeks have done their duty, which is to lay eggs that hatch into imported Cabbage Worms. You may think that you don’t have any—and then they get larger and cause serious damage. At this time they are still in their early stages, and they feed on the youngest leaves. Look right into the growing tip for little holes—and carefully look at the undersides of those leaves. The larvae grow quickly, and the larger they are the more they eat. A timely spray of B.t. kurstaki or aizawi strains works really well. In curly kales, these worms are harder to see, but they won’t be when your customers find them in their steamed greens...
Asparagus beetles are very busy feeding, mating, laying eggs and hatching out of eggs. They've been seen in Chepachet and Kingston. The larval stage ends up being the most damaging, much like Colorado potato beetle larvae, because their numbers are so much greater than the adults. Damage on asparagus is deceiving: those fine needles are actually modified stems called cladodes, but they do lots of photosynthesizing. This creates sugars that get stored in the fleshy roots attached to the crown, where the next year’s buds are formed. Beetle damage, if substantial, can affect next year’s crop, plus the overall life of the bed. Younger plantings are especially vulnerable to long-term damage. Depending on the overall fertility of your soil and the history of amendments, fertilizer may be called for. Prior to the first harvest year, it can be applied in the early spring. Once you are into harvesting, apply at the end of the harvest season, about 5 or 6 weeks after the start. It makes the most sense to soil test in order to determine your soil’s current conditions. Asparagus likes near neutral pH, and being here in the rain-fed Northeast, our soils tend to revert to acidic. If you have added several inches of compost prior to establishing the beds, then chances are that you have sufficient P. Check the New England Vegetable Management Guide for fertility recommendations, both during establishment and for maintenance: https://nevegetable.org/crops/asparagus

Allium Leaf Miner: NOT in RI (YET)

This pest of onions, leeks, garlic and others was only first confirmed in the Western Hemisphere in December 2015 in Pennsylvania. It has been found in Berkshire County, MA. See details in this exhaustive article from Penn State Extension, including diagnostic pictures: https://extension.psu.edu/allium-leafminer-expected-to-emerge-in-april. Speaking of onions, it seems that onion thrips are overwintering in garlic cloves and overwintering onions. If you have onions of some size at this point, it’s time to look down into the centers of the plants. At this point, there will only be adults, which are dark in color, and maybe the size of an exclamation point (!). After a few weeks of infestation, you can expect to see the larval stages as well, which are yellowish. Their damage of from the rasping mouthparts, which scrape off the epidermal layer, and eventually cause browning of whole leaves. You can find good pictures here: http://ag.umass.edu/vegetable/fact-sheets/thrips-onion.

If you have some garlic plants with a lot of lower leaves, it makes sense to pull a few plants out and check for fusarium. These plants will tend to look stunted compared to others, especially at this time when garlic is growing very rapidly. If the basil plate is black and there is general rot, remove all affected plants from the field- you don’t want it to spread and you don’t want it in your field. If, however, all of your plants have yellowing lower leaves, it’s more likely that they are nitrogen deficient. It’s too late to correct at this date- but this should tell you that you may need to amend with more organic N in the fall, or topdress with more N in the very early spring.
More sightings...

**Potato flea beetles** have been seen here and there, but they are soon to be everywhere. They very much especially love newly transplanted eggplant seedlings. Protect them if you have a known resident population on your farm.

A few **Striped cucumber beetles** have been seen in high tunnels in MA, but none in RI yet, though there are some out and about by this time, without a doubt.

Powdery mildew on tomato was seen in one high tunnel- avoid creating excessively lush plants. All that big foliage creates high humidity and brings the disease on, particularly where you’ve had it before. Insecticidal soap mixed at 3/4 strength can hold it back for some time if you start early. It has its longest effect if applied in the evening.

Germination failure of snap peas- the suspected culprit was seedcorn maggot, which are now already pupated and new adult flies will soon emerge in search of other large-seeded vegetables like beans and sweet corn.

Out and about at the URI Agronomy Farm

This **winter rye cover crop** is nearly ready to take down, though it could have been taken down any time up until now. When the heads begin shedding pollen (anthesis) is about as late as recommended, otherwise the C/N ratio gets very high and decomposition will cause a serious N deficiency. If you aren’t prepared to chop this much material, avoid letting it get to this stage!

Field to the right has been flail-mowed, which breaks up residue into smaller particles, and these will break down more rapidly. More and more people have purchased BCS or Grillo walk-behind tractors, and flail choppers are available for these. Not sure how well they can handle the tall cereal rye, though-let us know. Following chopping, some may choose to plant through residue, though it needs to be thick to suppress weeds effectively. Others may moldboard plow, rototill, or spade.