

FUN FACES OF WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE

BERRY BUNCH'S CRANBERRY FAST FACTS (8/2011)



Production Information

The American Cranberry is a low-growing, vining, woody perennial plant with small, alternate, oval leaves. The plant produces horizontal stems or runners up to 6 feet (2 m) long. Short vertical branches 2 to 8 inches (5 to 20 cm) in height, called uprights, grow from buds on the runners and produce both vegetative and fruit buds. Each fruit bud may contain as many as seven flowers. They prefer sandy, marshy land called bogs.

Water is used during harvest to float the fruit for easier collection, and during the winter months to protect the plants from freezing and desiccation. The rest of the year the fruit is grown on dry beds.

Harvest begins in late September. Harvest has been improved from being done by hand, to using a two-handled rake, to mechanical pickers and water reels. There are two types of harvest methods: wet and dry. Wet harvest involves flooding a dry bog with water. Water reels (like egg beaters) drive through the water loosening the berries from the vines. Floating berries are corralled, loaded into trucks, and made into juices, drinks and foods. Dry harvesting uses a machine with moving metal teeth to comb the berries off of the vine. Berries are collected in a burlap sack on the back of the machine. The bags are lifted by helicopter so they don't damage vines. Many fresh berries are harvested this way.

Wisconsin Production

Wisconsin produces about 57% of the nation's crop with over 3.95 million barrels of fruit. An average acre will yield about 220 barrels per acre- a barrel weighs about 100 pounds. Cranberry growers own more than 180,000 acres and cranberries are harvested on about 18,000 of those acres. 18 different counties in Wisconsin grow cranberries. The cranberry was named Wisconsin's state fruit on April 5, 2004. Cranberry marshes date back to the 1830's which was before Wisconsin became a state.

Career Information

Seasonal workers are needed for harvest including fresh fruit sorters, truck drivers, machine operators, and pilots. Environmental affairs managers help producers protect the soil and groundwater. Crop scouts assist in preventing insect, disease and weed control. Recipe developers and food scientists find new uses for the cranberries and explore the nutritional benefits. Cartographers (mapmaker) assist producers in laying out fields.

Trivia

- There are about 450 cranberries in a pound; 4,500 cranberries in a gallon of juice, and 45,000 cranberries in a 100-pound barrel.
- American soldiers used dried cranberries in World War II to keep healthy and energized.
- 91% of Thanksgiving dinners include cranberry sauce in their menu.

Other Information

Cranberry marshes need support lands which consist of natural and man-made wetlands, woodlands and uplands. The support land is not used for growing the crop, but is important for the series of ditches, dikes, dams and reservoirs necessary to have an adequate water supply. The natural wetlands help control flooding and filter and recycle water. The marshes are home to many forms of wildlife and some endangered species.

In 1880, John "Peg Leg" Webb from New Jersey discovered the cranberry bounce. Instead of carrying his load of cranberries down the barn steps, he poured them down the steps and watched how they reacted. The freshest, firmest fruit went to the bottom while the rotten and bruised berries didn't go down very far. A bounce board separator was developed to simulate this test and is still used today.