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WISCONSIN 2010 CRANBERRY HARVEST GOING STRONG

State leaders tour cranberry harvest; announce federal grants to enhance sustainable growing practices and develop sustainability metrics for cranberry industry

WISCONSIN RAPIDS, Wis. – The [Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association](#) (WSCGA) and the [Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection](#) (DATCP) today announced that four U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) specialty crop block grants have been awarded to cranberry industry researchers to enhance and further measure sustainability efforts on Wisconsin marshes. The announcement was made as researchers and state officials today toured harvest operations at two marshes in central Wisconsin.

DATCP assists organizations in applying for specialty crop block grants, which are awarded by the USDA to help states increase the competitiveness of their specialty crops, such as Wisconsin's cranberries. Research focused on conservation and environmental outcomes, such as sustainable cranberry production, is one way the USDA urges states to focus on continuously improving the industry.

“Wisconsin's cranberry industry is a leader for specialty crops nationwide in how farmers can grow crops in a sustainable manner,” said Agriculture Secretary Randy Romanski. “Grants like these play important roles in keeping Wisconsin farmers on the competitive edge as the agriculture industry continues to evolve and compete worldwide.”

USDA specialty crop block grants were awarded to [Rebecca Harbut](#), an associate professor of horticulture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, to study how to use soil moisture probes to conserve water on cranberry marshes. She will also conduct a separate study on how automated irrigation systems that are used for frost protection can be used to reduce production costs and increase water use efficiency in cranberry production. A third grant was awarded to [Jed Colquhoun](#), also an associate professor of horticulture at UW, to develop new and test existing [sustainability](#) standards for cranberry production. Additionally, a grant was awarded to the [Wisconsin Cranberry Discovery Center](#) to create an online marketplace for Wisconsin-made cranberry products.

“Some of the largest food retailers in the world are asking for sustainability metrics for food production and that interest is growing,” said Colquhoun. “Though sustainable agriculture is certainly not a new topic, it is high on the radar of consumers, buyers and retailers, and as an industry it's important that cranberry growers provide measurable standards of sustainability.”

Many state growers are actively involved in sustainable growing efforts, such as implementing nutrient management plans, integrated pest management projects, using moisture monitoring to conserve water and using alternative energy sources. In fact, Fred Prehn who owns [Prehn Cranberry Company](#) outside of Tomah, Wis., uses two wind turbines and solar panels to power his marsh.

“Cranberry growers rely completely on the land, water and other natural resources,” said Prehn. “As we continue to learn more about sustainable growing options, we have a responsibility to embrace those options and be good stewards of the environment.”

Colquhoun and Harbut’s studies will further advance the way in which Wisconsin cranberry growers are using sustainable methods to produce a high-quality fruit crop.

“These grants come on the heels of an important survey released this year by the University of Wisconsin on how state cranberry growers have made great strides in sustainability over the past 20 years,” said Tom Lochner, executive director of the WSCGA. “At harvest time we are reminded that ultimately, we’re putting food on the grocery store shelves, and now more than ever, people want to know that those foods are produced in an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable way. That’s what we are aiming to do.”

The 2010 harvest, which began Sept. 20, is expected to run through mid-October. Wisconsin is projected to produce a crop of 4.35 million barrels this harvest season, a 10 percent increase over the 2009 crop. The state produces more than half of the world’s cranberry supply and has been harvesting the berries since the 1830s.

Cranberries, the official state fruit, are Wisconsin’s largest fruit industry in both value and size, and accounted for more than 80 percent of cash receipts to Wisconsin’s fruit growers in 2008. More than 250 growers produce cranberries on approximately 18,000 acres of land throughout 18 Wisconsin counties in central and northern Wisconsin. More information on Wisconsin’s cranberry industry, its history and recipes, is available at www.wiscran.org.

WSCGA was founded in 1887 and is committed to developing and implementing programs that will assist growers in doing a better job of growing cranberries and strengthen the public support for the industry in Wisconsin. For more information, visit www.wiscran.org. WSCGA is also on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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EDITOR NOTES:

For high-resolution photos of the cranberry harvest, vines, berries, or cranberry products, please contact mbalfany@zeppos.com or knaidl@zeppos.com or call 414-276-6237.