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## STATE CRANBERRY INDUSTRY MAKES STRIDES IN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

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**Six-year effort results in 10,000 acres of sustainably managed marsh land**

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*More federal cost-share dollars to assist with water quality practices expected this spring*

**WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WIS.** – The Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association (WSCGA) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) today announced that a six-year effort to improve grower participation in NRCS conservation programs and water quality on cranberry operations shows significant strides toward sustainable agriculture. The review looked at 51 environmental projects begun by state cranberry growers since 2004 that were funded in part through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

“There has been a dedicated effort in Wisconsin’s cranberry industry over the last six years to improve conservation program participation and we at NRCS are pleased that EQIP has become an effective tool in this effort,” said Patricia Leavenworth, state conservationist with the NRCS. “When the program was first introduced, few if any Wisconsin cranberry growers were involved in these kinds of efforts. Now, the growers have embraced this program, and they are a great example of how we can adapt ag conservation practices to meet the unique needs of specialty crops.”

EQIP, funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Bill, offers financial and technical help to implement conservation practices on agriculture land. Fifty-one EQIP contracts have been awarded to dozens of Wisconsin cranberry growers in the last six years, bringing the total amount to nearly \$2 million allocated for conservation projects. In addition to EQIP, WSCGA launched its own conservation funding effort, the Whole Farm Planning Incentives Program (WFPIP), in 2007 to supplement conservation work left unfunded through EQIP. An additional \$376,000 to date has gone toward that effort.

According to Leavenworth, in the coming weeks, more than \$14 million is expected to be awarded statewide to Wisconsin farmers for EQIP projects in 2010. EQIP is open to all types of agriculture, and according to WSCGA, five cranberry marshes have applied for new funds in 2010. Growers were able to submit applications for the 2010 EQIP through mid-February, and they will be notified by April 1 if their conservation projects have been chosen for funding.

“More than half of Wisconsin’s cranberry acreage, approximately 10,000 acres, has these new conservation practices in place,” said Mike Moss, president of WSCGA. “Wisconsin is fortunate to have a relationship with the NRCS to specifically work with our industry to maximize our environmental commitment.”

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Moss said EQIP projects on cranberry marshes range from nutrient management practices to tailwater recovery systems. In fact, he has been awarded EQIP funding for soil moisture and temperature monitoring for his Elm Lake Cranberry Company near Wisconsin Rapids. Moss said the system, which can give readings every 10 minutes, measures pressure and tension in the soil. From there, Moss said he can decide how much or how little to water his cranberry beds.

Additionally, this spring, Valley Corporation near Tomah will complete the final phase of its three-year project funded by both EQIP and WFPIP by installing the last parts of its high uniformity irrigation system on the cranberry marsh. Owner Ed Grygleski said the new system allows water to be applied more evenly and efficiently over the cranberry beds in less time, which in turn uses less water and energy.

“My family has been in the cranberry business for three generations, and the environmental practices we have been able to put in place helps our business grow and ensure we’ll be here for the next generation,” said Grygleski. “Programs that help fund environmental projects are valuable to encourage our growers to keep ‘growing green.’”

Additionally, NRCS has worked with Wisconsin cranberry growers to plan and implement funding support for:

- 2,100 acres of cranberries managed by nutrient management systems
- 1,800 acres of cranberries with pest management systems in place
- 710 acres of cranberries grown using irrigation water management systems

“In an effort to sustainably manage their marshes, Wisconsin cranberry growers really stepped up to the plate to go above and beyond what is necessary for a sustainable crop,” said Tom Lochner, executive director of WSCGA. “That’s a great result for the NRCS to see from such an important crop in our state’s history, economy and environment.”

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 of the industry in Wisconsin. For more information, visit [www.wiscran.org](http://www.wiscran.org). Also, for more information on the domestic and international marketing of cranberries visit, [www.uscranberries.com](http://www.uscranberries.com) and health and research information on cranberries is available at [www.cranberryinstitute.org](http://www.cranberryinstitute.org).

NRCS is the lead federal agency for conservation on private working lands. NRCS’s primary mission is to help landowners plan, design and implement conservation practices on agricultural land. In addition, NRCS implements the conservation programs in the federal Farm Bill including financial assistance, stewardship, wetland restoration, farmland protection, wildlife habitat, and others. For more information, visit [www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov).