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WISCONSIN CRANBERRY INDUSTRY AND STATE AG LEADERS AIM TO EXPAND EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES

China's Olympic & World Champion athletes tour harvest to learn about U.S. farming and food processing & the growing role of the healthy fruit in China

Cranberry exports have increased 14 percent in last year

WISCONSIN RAPIDS, Wis. – As the nation's cranberry industry continues its strong focus on expanding exports of the native fruit, the [Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association](#) (WSCGA) today officially kicked off the 2011 harvest with the help of 12 of China's most decorated sports champions, as well as experts from Wisconsin Department of Agriculture. The athletes, participants in the Chinese Champions Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, learned how the cranberry is grown, harvested and processed and about industry exports of the unique fruit to China and around the globe.

The event, held at Elm Lake Cranberry Company in Wisconsin Rapids, was the official kick-off for Wisconsin's cranberry harvest that will continue until late October. Wisconsin is the leading cranberry producing state in the U.S. and it provides more than 50 percent of the entire world's supply of cranberries.

The [U.S. Cranberry Marketing Committee](#) (CMC), part of the USDA, has internationally marketed cranberries since 1999 and reports that cranberry industry exports overall have increased 14 percent by volume in the past year alone. The international markets the CMC specifically targets for promotions – including Germany, France, South Korea, Australia and others – have seen an increase in cranberry exports over the last year of 31 percent by volume, and other markets like China have seen growth as well. Cranberry exports to China increased from approximately 14,000 barrels in 2009 to more than 18,600 barrels in 2010.

“Demonstrating our harvest is a great way for one of America's traditional fruits to be shared on the world stage while also helping to increase awareness of the berry and its history, natural growing methods and health benefits in China,” said Tom Lochner, executive director of WSCGA. “These athletes are admired in their home country, and we wanted to share with them a unique Wisconsin industry so they can share that knowledge when they are back in China.”

These elite athletes are at UW-Madison through the Chinese Champions Program, a program designed to bring Olympic and World Champions to the University to learn new skills and gain international experience. The athletes' visit to the cranberry marsh is part of a northern Wisconsin tour where the group tried cranberry harvesting, participated in harvesting competitions against state cranberry growers and also toured a Wisconsin ginseng farm.

"Cranberries are still fairly new to China but interest in them is growing," said Michelle Hogan, interim executive director of the CMC. "Part of the appeal of cranberries for Chinese consumers is that the berries are a sustainably-grown and natural food that has proven health benefits."

Approximately 195 million pounds of cranberries were exported from the United States last year, with the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and Mexico as the largest export markets.

"There's a tremendous amount of growth potential for cranberries in the international marketplace," said Jennifer Lu, a native of China and economic development consultant for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. "Currently, about 23 percent of the nation's cranberry supply is exported, and we think there is great potential for the fruit to reach a broader worldwide scale. I know that many Chinese are very health conscious, and the cranberry would be a perfect addition to the traditional diet."

Currently cranberries are grown by more than 250 state growers, on 21,000 acres in 20 Wisconsin counties. The 2011 cranberry crop is projected to be approximately 4.3 million barrels, according to [USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service](#). The 2011 cranberry harvest began in late September and will run through late October on most marshes. According to Lochner, Wisconsin's cranberry industry provides approximately 3,400 jobs and has an annual economic impact of \$300 million.

"It is important for all of us to recognize and celebrate how we are interconnected around the world," said Gilles Bousquet, UW-Madison's dean of the Division of International Studies and vice provost for Globalization. "Having the Chinese athletes visit ginseng and cranberry producing regions of our state highlights ties between Wisconsin and China."

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](#).

For more information on the domestic and international marketing of cranberries, please visit www.uscranberries.com, and for more information on UW-Madison's Chinese Champions Program at UW-Madison please visit the UW-Madison Division of International Studies website at www.international.wisc.edu.