



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Permitting Review Process Finalized; Will Assist In Expansion of State's Largest Fruit Crop

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Collaborative Effort, Quick Action by State Will Bring Jobs and Investment

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Permitting Review Process Upholds Tough Regulatory Standards, Speeds Marsh Expansions

WISCONSIN RAPIDS, Wis. - The Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association (WSCGA) today announced that an agreement has been reached among state and federal regulators to solidify a permitting review process for cranberry marsh expansion in Wisconsin. The new permitting review process is the result of a collaborative and quick effort by the State of Wisconsin to help the industry grow in the state, and with that growth, bring in new jobs and more economic activity. Agreement on the process was reached between the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the two regulatory agencies are expected to sign a Memo of Understanding on the process in the coming days.

“We are very appreciative of the state’s leadership role and the top-priority attention given to helping expand Wisconsin’s cranberry industry and, ultimately, its economy,” said Tom Lochner, executive director of WSCGA. “Just over two months ago, we announced that the opportunity was before Wisconsin to expand the state’s largest fruit crop, and with it, bring significant economic impact and jobs. The Governor, the WDNR and many throughout the state saw that this was a crucial time for action.”

The permitting review process upholds all state and federal regulatory standards while establishing a streamlined review procedure that will benefit both growers and regulators. In July, WSCGA announced its need for such a review process to help the cranberry industry expand in Wisconsin and add up to 1,115 jobs and have an additional \$75 million annual economic impact.

The new marsh expansion permitting review process now allows for one common permit application to be submitted to both the Corps and the WDNR, rather than two separate applications. The process includes a pre-application meeting between the grower and regulators to discuss the expansion project and gain feedback before the costly and time-consuming permit application is finalized. According to Lochner, that early dialogue and feedback will result in more complete and realistic permit applications being submitted, making the process more efficient for both growers and the federal and state regulators.

According to Lochner, what does not change is that federal regulations continue to require compensatory mitigation for all wetland impacts, and if a project would have a significant impact on wetlands, then it will not be approved.

“It makes great sense to have a review process in place that ultimately helps the cranberry industry and regulators do their jobs,” said WDNR Secretary Matt Frank. “This agreement should help speed up and simplify the permitting process while still being stringent in enforcing the environmental protection standards of the state and the federal government. Many parties came together and worked diligently to make this happen and the end result hopefully will be the proper growth of an important state industry.”

The WDNR took the lead role in bringing together a variety of key parties, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Army Corps of Engineers, key environmental leaders and the cranberry industry in establishing the new policy.

“There was a lot of hard work done by many to quickly move this effort forward in the right way. That quick action means we have the opportunity to receive timely decisions from government regarding the planting of new cranberry vines this coming spring,” said Ed Sabey, president of WSCGA. “That is critical. Growing regions like Canada want to expand as well, and cranberry companies worldwide are watching to see where the new growth will occur first.”

Cranberry companies, including Cliffstar, Clement Pappas, Decas Cranberries, Alpine Foods, Wisconsin Cranberry Cooperative and Ocean Spray have been very clear that if the marshes are built and the berries are produced in Wisconsin, they will look to grow their processing companies in Wisconsin.

“This is welcome news to our growers in Wisconsin and our company,” said Paul Harder, CEO of New York-based Cliffstar, “As more cranberries are produced in Wisconsin, it makes economic sense for more processing to take place in Wisconsin. It’s that added value through processing the crop that will bring more economic benefits and jobs. We are watching expansion progress closely as we plan for new facilities to manufacture sweetened dried cranberries and other cranberry products.”

According to WSCGA, the cranberry industry needs to grow an additional 1.5 million barrels of cranberries in Wisconsin to meet future worldwide demand, and Wisconsin is the best place for such expansion due to grower and research expertise, use of new technologies and growing techniques. A 2008 economic study conducted by Steve Deller and Ed Jesse, both of UW Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, found that with such an expansion, the state would realize 1,115 new jobs and an increased economic impact of \$75 million annually. Lochner added that is a conservative estimate and those figures do not even include the added anticipated growth of processing and manufacturing jobs and other positive impacts for the state’s economy.

WDNR staff is now learning about the new process, and in the coming weeks, WSCGA and the WDNR will be reaching out to the more than 250 cranberry growers in Wisconsin to educate them on the expansion process. Growers will then determine if an expansion is right for their marsh. According to Lochner, WSCGA expects several growers to enter the permitting process yet this fall and if all goes well, some will plant new vines in spring 2009.

Editor’s Note:

In 2007, Wisconsin’s cranberry industry accounted for more than 80 percent of all fruit grown in Wisconsin in terms of revenue. Cranberries are Wisconsin’s largest fruit crop in terms of acreage with approximately 18,000 acres of cranberries across 19 Wisconsin counties, and Wisconsin provides nearly 60 percent of the nation’s cranberry supply.

Wisconsin’s 2008 cranberry crop is projected by the USDA National Agricultural Statistical Service to be approximately 3.85 million barrels, which is 4 percent larger than the state’s 2007 crop. The 2008 harvest is currently under way on marshes across central and northern Wisconsin.