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## **State's Largest Fruit Crop Is Ripe for Expansion**

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### **World Demand for Cranberries Presents Jobs and Economic Opportunities**

WISCONSIN RAPIDS, Wis. - The Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association (WSCGA) and national cranberry industry leaders today announced an effort to expand Wisconsin cranberry marshes and bring up to 1,115 new jobs to the state and increase the industry's significant, positive economic impact by \$75 million annually.

"The opportunity to expand Wisconsin's largest fruit crop and the associated job growth and economic activity is upon us," said Tom Lochner, executive director of WSCGA. "Experts project an increased demand for cranberries, and Wisconsin is by far the best state to meet that need and reap the economic benefits, but we need to seize the opportunity before other states or world regions do so."

According to industry leaders like Ocean Spray Cranberries, Cliffstar, the Cranberry Marketing Committee and others, the cranberry industry as a whole needs to plant approximately 5,000 additional acres to meet domestic and world demand. And, according to a 2008 economic study conducted by Steve Deller and Ed Jesse, both of UW Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, if all 5,000 acres planted are in Wisconsin, 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 processing and manufacturing jobs and other positive impacts for the state's economy.

"We've seen over the last ten years that the manufacturing and processing jobs come to the fruit," said Lochner. "In just weeks, Ocean Spray will complete a \$50 million expansion of its Wisconsin Rapids Craisins<sup>®</sup> facility that will provide 90 new jobs. Urban Processing in Wisconsin Rapids has undergone three plant expansions since 2001 to now employ 42 people full time. And, Gardner/Badger State Fruit Processing in Pittsville has constructed over 700,000 square feet of storage and in 2004 established a processing plant that employs 20 full-time people, and it, too, is looking to expand."

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. Due to reinvestment and renovation of old plantings with hybrid vines, effective pest and disease control, and improved management, Wisconsin growers produce approximately 28 percent more fruit per acre than the national average.

According to Lochner, Wisconsin has the investors, expertise, land and climate to make this happen, as Ocean Spray has already designated \$60 million for new farm investments in North America and other cranberry companies are following suit. He added, the key to making the expansion successful will be working through the necessary permitting and approval processes. Cranberry vines are wetland plants that thrive in wetland areas because of the soil conditions and the access to water that the crop requires

“Some of the largest cranberry growing counties in Wisconsin are considered more than 30 percent wetland and many of the oldest cranberry marshes in the state are in wetland areas,” said Ed Sabey, board president of WSCGA. “Expansions will have an impact, but we think that can be mitigated and provide a win-win-win for the economy, the environment and the industry.”

Sabey added, “Wisconsin needs a strong and diverse agricultural base and many federal, state and local governments and groups are working to preserve our farmland. This is one way to further that effort and grow agriculture as a key state industry.”

According to Pat Leavenworth, State Conservationist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), WSCGA and the industry as a whole are agricultural leaders in working on water, pest and nutrient management. “The cranberry industry has done some innovative things and developed great best management practices that show its commitment to growing and managing the crop with the environment in mind,” said Leavenworth.

WSCGA has been involved in a \$4 million partnership with the USDA and NRCS since 2002 to provide conservation programs for Wisconsin growers to identify and implement environmentally sound, science-based conservation plans.

“Wisconsin growers take rules and regulations seriously, and we want to go through all the appropriate steps for expansion, but the state can be of great assistance in providing timely reviews and accurate direction at the onset of any proposed project,” said Sabey.

Sabey added that timing is key because a cranberry marsh takes time to permit and construct, and then, even once the vines are planted, it takes approximately three years for the marsh to produce a productive crop.

“In today’s global economy the rules of supply and demand win, and we hope Wisconsin can play a significant role in that equation,” said Randy C. Papadellis, CEO of Ocean Spray. “Other growing regions including Canada provinces like British Columbia, Quebec, Atlantic Provinces and Ontario as well as Chile are interested, but Wisconsin has the expertise, facilities, success, trained workforce and more that make it a great place to look first.”

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