

3rd in 1983

State's cranberry crop sinks

Associated Press

TABERNACLE, N.J. — New Jersey cranberry farmers said yesterday that the size of their crop was down from last year's record harvest, while federal officials said they expected production in other states to hit record levels in 1983.

"Weather conditions have been poor for cranberry production," said James Gibson, a spokesman for the state Crop Reporting Service.

Pollination problems and low amounts of summer rain stunted the number of berries, said farmer Stephen Lee 3d, whose great-great-grandfather planted his first cranberry vine in 1870 in this Burlington County community. However, officials said the output still would be slightly above normal for the state.

New Jersey ranks third in cranberry production, behind Massachusetts and Wisconsin, state officials said.

In 1982, cranberry production reached 295,000 barrels in New Jersey, surpassing the record of 276,000 barrels set in 1976. Each barrel weighs 100 pounds, Gibson said.

This year, he said, New Jersey officials expect the state's crop to be about 250,000 barrels, 15 percent less than in 1982.

"It varies from bog to bog," Lee said. "... I've heard some people who have quite a bit less than last year."

Gibson said New Jersey averages about 240,000 barrels each year. Last year, the crop was worth \$13.7 million to growers. Despite the lower yield, Gibson said this year's crop should bring almost as much money because the price per barrel was staying high.

U.S. Department of Agriculture figures estimate the nationwide crop in 1983 would reach a record 2.95 million barrels, 1 percent above the record 2.92 million, set last year, Gibson said.

Lee said cranberries pollinate best in warm weather and need cool fall days to produce a chemical that causes them to turn a deep red.

But the extreme heat during the crop's flowering period — late June and early July — damaged flowers on the plants and caused a decline in the number of honeybees, needed for pollination, experts said.

The state's cranberry harvest began this month, as farmers flooded bogs with knee-deep water and began using special large machines that churn the water to knock the berries off the vines.

Cranberries farmed in New Jersey bogs are used mainly in processing for juice and jelly. Commercial cranberry production is exclusive to the United States, although Scandinavian countries and West Germany are experimenting in cultivating the berry.