

Ray Samuels
265-5050 Co. Agent 758-9152
Chatsworth
Haines Slavin-Delmarco 726-1600

Cranberry glut puts farmers in a jam

By KIRK MOORE
STAFF WRITER

Like other Pinelands cranberry growers, Jeff and Ned Lipman are looking at an immense fall harvest. The trouble is, they can't get rid of all that fruit.

So with cranberry prices still in a deep funk, the Lipman brothers are trying something novel — a pick-it-yourself cranberry harvest.

One of the last cranberry operations in Ocean County, the Lipman farm off Dover Road just outside South Toms River will open to the public from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 27-28 and again Nov. 3-4, in what could be the first mass hand-picking of cranberries in decades.

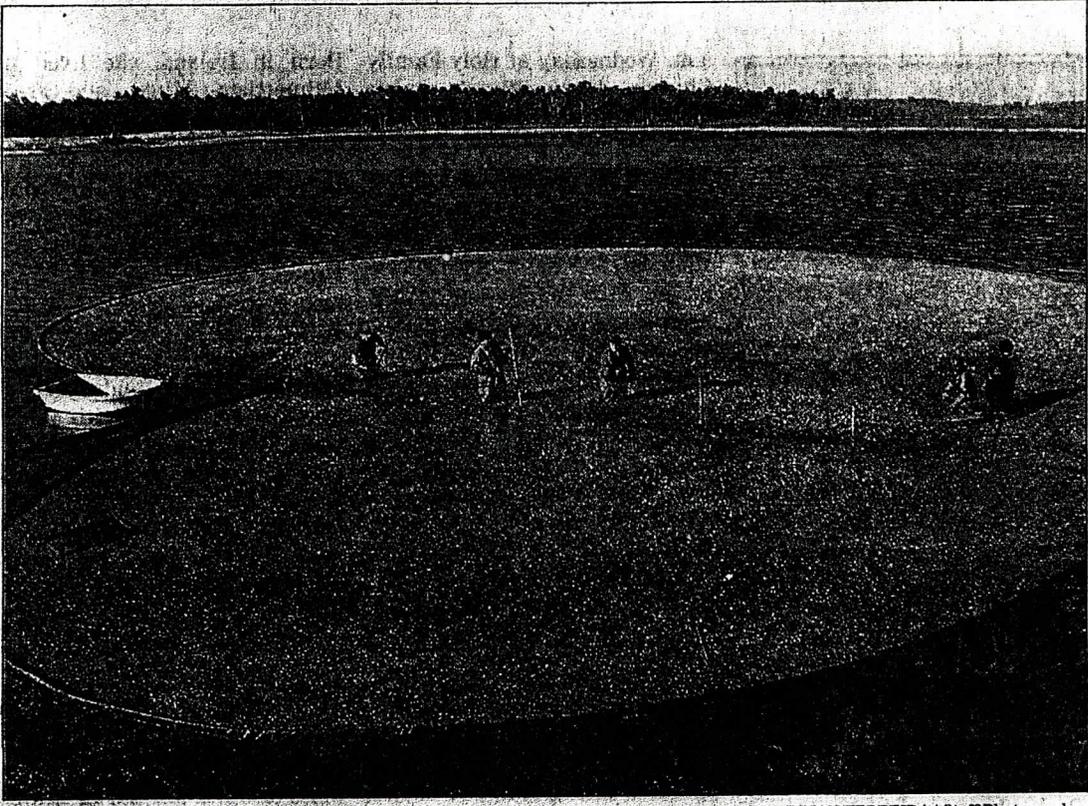
"We're going to have two bogs, about 16 acres, that we didn't pick," Ned Lipman said. "It will be dry — we'll drain the bogs the week before — so people won't need boots, except if they come very early and here's a dew."

Cranberries are usually "wet harvested," by flooding the bogs where the low-growing cranberry vines snake across moist soil.

The vines are then agitated with mechanical beaters, to knock the fruit off so the berries will float to the surface. The cranberries are then corralled by workers wading into the water and pushed onto conveyors that load the harvest into trucks.

"We'll flood one of the bogs and knock fruit off, so people can see how we do it," Lipman said. The event is planned so people can learn something about cranberry culture and the operation of the Lipmans' farm, located on the Jake's Branch of the Toms River two miles west of Exit 80 off the Garden State Parkway.

Admission to the farm will be free, Lipman said, and he plans on offering visitors two bag sizes for their picking: a regular bag for \$5, and an institutional-



BRIAN FERREIRA/ Staff Photographer

Migrant workers corral cranberries as they are harvested at the Lipman farm off Dover Road outside South Toms River. Owners have set up pick-it-yourself days for the public to take the fruit off their hands at a very affordable price.

sized sack for \$10 for people who want a lot of fruit for home canning or other projects.

"We want to have something for everybody, from families with kids to mature adults from the retirement communities," he said.

Along with cranberry demonstrations, there will be marketing representatives from the Ocean Spray cooperative, touting samples of the new "white cranberry" juice drinks. The clear products are made from the cranberries of early September, before they take on their deep red hue.

Wet-harvested fruit goes into cranberry products such as juices. The "dry" cranberries sold in the supermarket produce aisles are but a tiny portion of the fall harvest, mostly picked on smaller farms in Massachusetts.

Before New Jersey growers invented and refined equipment for wet harvesting in the mid-20th century, the cranberry industry depended on migrant labor for dry picking. Since the cranberry business started in the 1840s, those pickers were recruited from among Pinelands native families; old 19th century illustrations of cranberry harvests in Ocean County feature hordes of pickers, including women and children, working their way across the bogs.

Over the next century Italian and Irish immigrants and African-American day laborers from the Philadelphia area all worked for cranberry growers. For the last 50 years the Lipman family has hired Puerto Rican workers for the autumn manpower.

But they have less fruit to show for it, because of U.S. De-

partment of Agriculture plan, called a marketing order, to help the cranberry industry recover from several years of oversupply and depressed prices.

Projected prices to be paid by the Ocean Spray cooperative should be over \$20 per 100-pound barrel for the 2001 crop. That's better than the \$11 to \$12 paid to cooperative members for 2000, but they are still lucky to break even on the cost of maintaining their farms, the Lipmans say.

This year, growers can bring in only two-thirds of the fruit they sold during the heyday of the 1990s when prices briefly hit \$60 a barrel. It's that surplus the Lipmans hope the public will take off their hands, instead of forcing them to dump it.

Kirk Moore: (732) 557-5728

Haines - 726-1330 Ned Lipman - 732-932-9271 Rutgers
Email lipman@aesaf.rutgers.edu

Rt 530 - Dover Road

Lipman farm
Exit 80 - follow signs to S30 W
1 3/4 mile from Parkway