



Staff photos by Martin Griff

Officials gather yesterday at the J.J. White Farm in Pemberton Township to announce that the cranberry operation will become part of the state farmland preservation program.

# Berry farm adds to preservation pie

By **DONNA McARDLE**  
Special to The Times

PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP — Referring to the long and storied history of the J.J. White Farm, state Sen. Martha Bark was thrilled yesterday to stand amid the 600 acres of cranberry farm entered this week into the state's farmland preservation program.

"Certainly farming is critical to Burlington County," Bark said. "It feels like we've wanted to do this for 100 years."

The historic tract will soon celebrate its 150th birthday, from its early roots as a small cranberry farm to one of the central farms of the county. Yesterday's ceremony, set under a blazing sun with dust kicking up from the farm equipment in the fields and the babble of cedar water running through irrigation ditches, marks one more piece in the mosaic of farms the county and state are racing to preserve before development can encroach.

The J.J. White Farm's 600 acres also has the distinction of being a Pinelands protected parcel and John C. Stokes, executive director of the N.J. Pinelands Commission pointed to myriad reasons why the historic farm was such a treasured addition to the preservation list.

"Our offices occupy Elizabeth White's homestead," he said, referring to the woman credited with development of the commercially cultivated blueberry. "The Darlington's have been wonderful stewards of the land. The cranberry industry is unique to the Pinelands, and cranberry farms perform an important agricultural role while

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also protecting an important natural resource."

State Agriculture Secretary Charles M. Kuperus noted that the White parcel is one of 26 farms now preserved in the Pinelands region.

"This area is quite unique," he said. "We are No. 2 in the nation for blueberry production and No. 3 for cranberries. This all happens in the Pinelands region. There are 800,000 acres of New Jersey farmlands and already we've purchased 124,000. This is a piece of wonderful agricultural history."

For Joe Darlington and his dad Tom, the \$1.4 million in preservation funds is much needed capital for improvements and expansions to the fifth-generation farm. In the early 1900s, 600 workers would hand-pick the berries. Through mechanical innovation, much of it pioneered by Tom Darlington, 15 employees can now turn out 70,000 barrels, or 7 million pounds, of berries a season.

"I'm very pleased to be able to preserve our farm," said Joe Darlington. "We never questioned getting out of the farming business, but the influx of some capital will be very helpful right now, since we have



Tom Darlington and his son, Joe Darlington, walk along their land after the announcement of the purchase of the farm.

come through a period of economic stress. Some of the money will be for substantial things like painting the roof and some regular maintenance. We also plan on integrating some virgin wetlands into the immediate farmlands."

He also announced that the farm would open a retail store at another location and do out-

reach, with educational tours catering to a tourist trade interested in watching a cranberry farm in action.

"It will be for the rest of New Jersey to see what it's like to be on a cranberry farm in the Pinelands. This farm has survived almost 150 years based on innovation. That is how to build our future."