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Ocean Spray makes 'clear'-cut move

By Paul Leakan
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Company says it will produce white cranberry juice

Some Burlington County cranberry growers are hoping that Ocean Spray's planned new line of white cranberry juice will rake in more green for their harvest.

"If it increases sales, then it's another outlet for our berries," said Bill Cutts, a third-generation cranberry farmer from Tabernacle. "It seems like a good idea. It seems like a good product, but the proof is in the acceptance by the public."

Ocean Spray's white cranberry juice has been in development for several years, company spokesman Chris Phillips said Friday.

Phillips said the juice has tested "extremely well" in the firm's consumer focus groups, garnering one of the highest consumer-approval

scores of any of Ocean Spray's beverages.

The product also scored high with mothers who took part in the focus groups and liked that the new white juice won't cause stains.

The new juice will be targeted toward young, healthy families and those who don't prefer the stronger taste of red cranberry juice, Phillips said.

"It has a lighter, more refreshing taste for a consumer that prefers a smoother, mellower taste than our regular products," he said.

The white cranberry juice will be blended with other juices. Phillips, however, declined to comment on what percentage of cranberry juice is being put in the new beverage.

Phillips said Ocean Spray offi-

cial moved forward with the white cranberry juice, at least in part, because they recognized a certain appeal in Welch's white grape juice.

Sales of Welch's white grape juice increased by about 6 to 8 percent a year during the 1990s, a company official said Friday.

Phillips said the white cranberry juice might fall into the same market while having the same health benefits of Ocean Spray's regular red cranberry juice, including the berries' reported contributions to better urinary-tract health.

Considering that most people associate cranberries with the color red, it's unclear whether consumers will be enticed by the new white cranberry juice.

Hal Brown, who operates the

"Cranberry Stressline" Web site, pointed out that Pepsi recently failed when it tinkered with the color of its soda.

Crystal Pepsi was introduced in the early 1990s, but it eventually proved to be a financial flop and has been discontinued.

"When you mess with someone's perception of what a product is supposed to look like in their mind, you're taking a risk," Brown said.

Joe Darlington, an Ocean Spray cranberry grower from Pemberton Township, said the test marketing at least has shown encouraging proof that white cranberry juice won't be a flop.

Darlington hopes the new juice will help chip away at the worst national oversupply in the history

of the cranberry industry.

He said that while the new juice could help trim some of the surplus, the product could also present some advantages and disadvantages for growers.

For one, the new juice will utilize green and red cranberries. Green cranberries are harvested earlier in the season.

That could help some growers whose berries don't get quite as ripe as they would like.

However, by harvesting the cranberries sooner, growers could have a smaller yield because the cranberries won't grow to their full size.

And by harvesting green cranberries, some growers could give up about \$2 a barrel that Ocean Spray pays them for red cranberries. Growers often wait longer to harvest their cranberries, hoping to take advantage of the incentive.

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