

AGRICULTURE

# In berry bogs, it's harvest time

By Peter Van Allen  
Special to The Inquirer

Chatsworth farmer Bill Haines Jr. reached into a flooded cranberry bog and grabbed a handful of the red berries. Picking out the largest one, he popped it into his mouth. A group of onlookers winced and waited for his reaction to the bitter fruit.

"It's an acquired taste," Haines said, smiling.

Haines, a lanky, fourth-generation cranberry grower, was stumping recently for the fruit overlooked nearly every day but Thanksgiving. A tour of the 10,000-acre Haines & Haines farm in the Pinelands — miles from the malls and convenience stores so ubiquitous in other parts of New Jersey — made it hard to overlook the colorful berry.

Haines was joined by state and federal officials, cranberry growers from Massachusetts and representatives from the country's largest cranberry buyer, Ocean Spray.

Because cranberries depend on sandy, acidic soil and abundant fresh water, only five states grow virtually all the berries that end up on the Thanksgiving table. Haines and Ocean Spray have a vested interest in maintaining their unique crop, grown on regulated wetlands. In New Jersey, acreage used for cranberry bogs has dropped to 3,300 from 11,000 in the late 1940s.

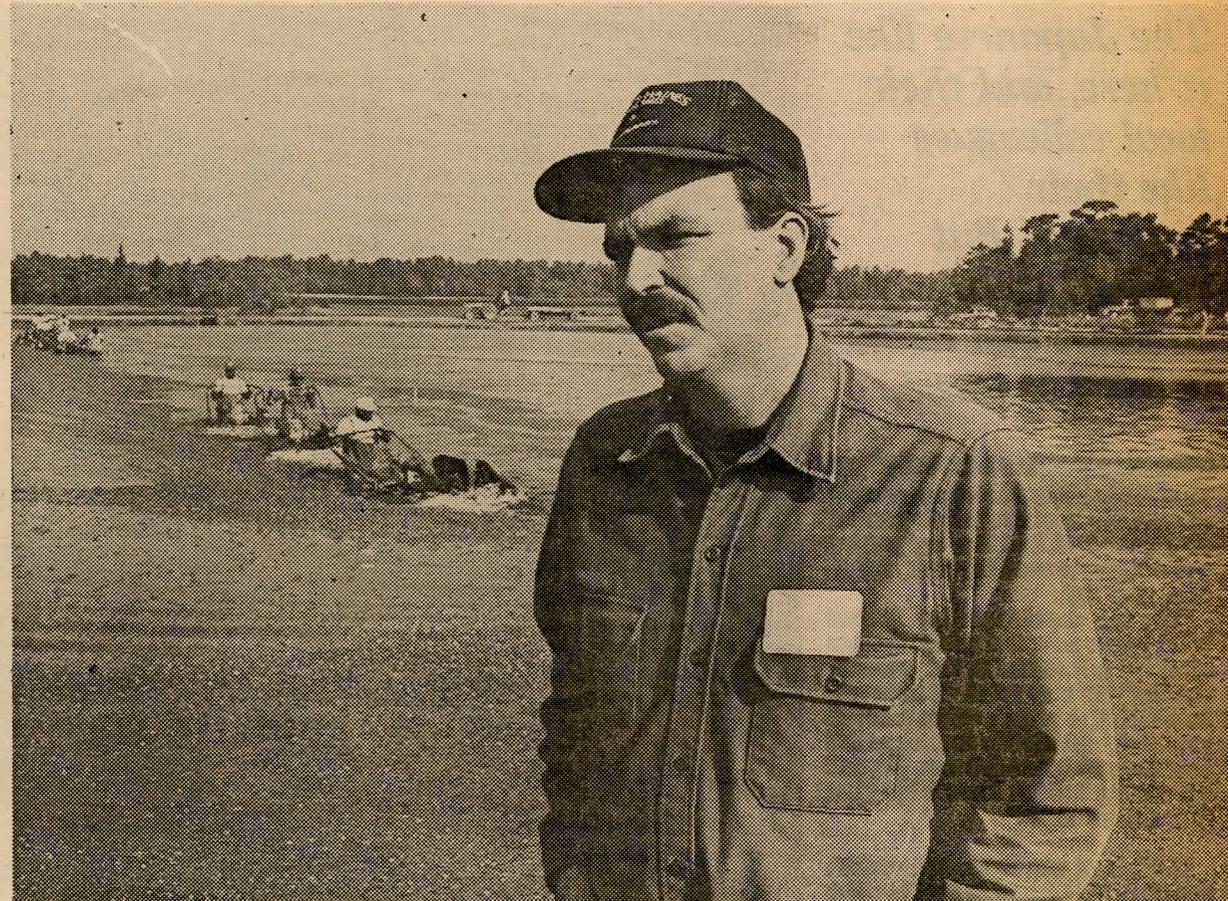
## *On Haines & Haines' 10,000 acres in the Pinelands, cranberries are the house special.*

The state is the third-largest producer behind Massachusetts and Wisconsin, with a \$16.7-million-per-year crop. For those counting, that's more than 18 million pounds of cranberries.

Haines' presentation began with a chalk talk in his pine-paneled office, adorned with an Oriental rug. But the 36-year-old farmer, wearing jeans and rubber boots, seemed more comfortable in the bogs than outlining industry initiatives and the like.

"Have you ever driven into the bogs?" asked an Ocean Spray photographer as Haines skillfully maneuvered the vanload of visitors on the narrow sand roads atop the dikes separating mazes of cranberry bogs. He hadn't.

On a cranberry farm, it's hard to determine what's manmade and what isn't. Bogs are elaborately irrigated and, during the seven-week harvest, are submerged. Water from the reservoir is released through a series of wooden dams. Because of



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### **Haines talks about his family-owned cranberry farm, the state's biggest, as harvest goes on behind.**

the elaborate natural irrigation needed, the thirsty cranberry bushes are grown on only a small percentage of the farm. Consequently, much of the landscape appears to be wild.

"We only plant on one acre out of 10. We have 850 acres of cranberries on 10,000 acres," said Haines, whose family farm is the largest cranberry producer in the state and the second-

largest nationally. "I'd say 50 percent of that is wetlands — that's a guess." Because cranberries are grown in wetlands in the Pinelands, their growth is tightly regulated by the Pinelands Protection Act, the Wetlands Act and the Clean Water Act.

Talk among the state's 44 cranberry growers is often of the red tape it takes to get started.

"In New Jersey, there's one new guy who has applied for permits" over the last few years, Haines said. "You have to get a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers, detailing what you want to do. You have to take an inventory of what's on the land currently. Then you get permits from the EPA and finally the Department (See CRANBERRIES from Page 11)

## AGRICULTURE

# It's harvest time in the berry bogs

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ment of Fish & Game. It shouldn't take three to four years to jump through the hoops, but it does."

Environmentalists say that the creation of cranberry farms drives out certain wildlife and creates a monoculture.

"Out here, we've got beaver, otter, snapping turtle, American bald eagles, whistling swans, heron, egrets, osprey," Haines said. He pointed to a manmade reservoir that collects water from the Wading River. "It would only take two to three years for this to all go back to natural wetlands.

"I understand why people don't want to use wetlands. But we don't ruin them. We don't haul in fill and build a mall or an apartment complex."

Haines stopped the van at a bog in the process of being harvested. Eight men, all dressed in fishing waders, guided what looked like a cross between a lawn mower and a combine through hip-deep water. That machine knocks the fruit off the bushes. The workers — mainly Puerto Ricans who are housed on the farm for the growing season and are paid \$5.05 an hour — were surrounded by thousands of floating, red berries.

"We pick them in any kind of weather, except lightning," said Haines. "We work 9-to-10-hour days during the seven-week harvest."

After the berries had been knocked from the bushes, a long yellow boom like those used to clean up oil spills collected the berries into one spot. A wheeled-conveyer belt then hoisted the berries into beat-up Chevrolet trucks, which in turn transport them to a barn for cleaning. From there, a tractor-trailer takes up to 50,000 pounds of berries to the Ocean Spray processing plant, a farmers cooperative in Chatsworth, three miles up Route 563.

Eventually, one-third of the berries will be sold as fresh fruit, most during the holidays. The rest is used for juices and a new, raisinlike product to be introduced in January.

While cranberry farmers have become more scarce, Haines — whose great-grandfather started growing cranberries after the Civil War — said his family's tradition hasn't changed too drastically.

"My son and daughter are out here during the summer, when school's out," he said. "And they'll probably take over."