



# HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

## Capitol Update

By Senator Howard Marklein

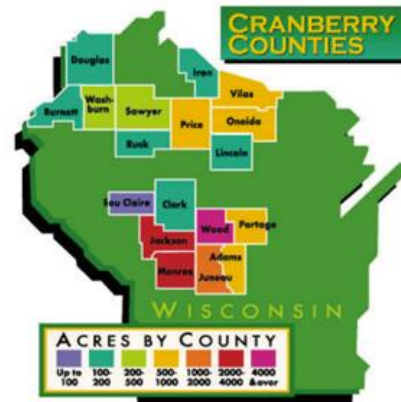
October 30, 2015

### Cranberries: Another Kind of Ag

The 17<sup>th</sup> Senate District is one of the geographically largest and most agriculturally-dense districts in the State of Wisconsin. We have the most farmland in our counties compared to all other senate districts. We boast six of the top 10 beef producing counties in the state. We produce a staggering variety and volume of vegetables and feed crops throughout our hills, valleys and plains. We are also home to several of the state's large cranberry operations in northern Juneau County!

I recently spent a morning with Martin and Lisa Potter at Cutler Cranberry Co. near Camp Douglas to learn more about the cranberry business in the 17<sup>th</sup> Senate District. It was an honor to be welcomed onto their farm and into their packaging facility to learn more about this important local industry and our official state fruit.

According to the Wisconsin Cranberry Growers Association, Wisconsin produces 60% of the nation's cranberries, making our state the #1 cranberry producer in the United States. Cranberries are native to Wisconsin where the plant's low running vines thrive in the sandy beds and marshes of central and northern Wisconsin. They are grown in 20 counties, including Juneau and Monroe counties, at the northernmost part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Senate District.



Cutler Cranberry Co. is an Oceanspray producer located north of Camp Douglas on County Road H in Juneau County. Their fruit is sold as fresh whole fruits and used in the production of juice, sauce and other cranberry products. Cutler harvests about 150,000 barrels (bbls) per season. Depending on the variety of cranberry, they usually yield between 100 bbls/acre to 773 bbls/acre.

With 30 full time employees and another 20 seasonal staff, Cutler Cranberry Co. was in full swing during my visit. I was able to watch the

harvest machinery moving through the beds to cut the berries from the vines. I was fascinated to learn that cranberries don't actually grow in water. The water is used as a part of the harvest. Cranberries have

hollow chambers that make them float. The water is used to make them easier to harvest, not necessarily for growing!

I was also welcomed to climb up onto a huge custom-made machine, designed and built by Paul Holloway, that pulls the berries into a massive hose and uses water to clean the berries before moving them into a large trailer bound for the Oceanspray facility in Tomah to be made into sauces or juices.

From our bird's eye view, Holloway explained that the machine is able to harvest two beds at the same time and it only takes 45 minutes and about four people to harvest each of their beds. The equipment is designed and built on-site to fit their unique needs. I was impressed by the ingenuity of the team and the amazing machines they have built to make the cranberry harvest efficient and productive.



Photos: Paul Holloway told me about the machine he designed and built to harvest and clean the cranberries.



Photos: Justin "Cowboy" (left) helped Gregg Hart (right) corral the cranberries toward the harvesting machine.

As we drove through the property, Potter pointed out several beds that are undergoing renovations to remove old vines, reshape the bed and install new irrigation. Potter and his team plant 54,000 plants per acre at a cost of about \$10,000 per acre! It takes 44 people to run a transplanting operation on each bed. But these perennial plants are hearty and with regular care and maintenance can produce cranberries for 100 years.

After our outside tour, I was welcomed into the packaging and warehouse facility by Martin's wife Lisa, who oversees the indoor operations of Cutler Cranberry Co.

The indoor staff were quickly sorting and bagging fresh-packed cranberries that will be distributed throughout the United States within days of leaving Camp Douglas. Potter estimated that the outdoor harvest would be completed by the first week of November, while the indoor work would likely continue until the first week of December.

Inside the temperature-controlled warehouse, thousands of trays of cranberries await sorting and packaging. The production facility is an interesting combination of traditional, hands-on work and high-tech machines. Computerized optical scanners combine with focused, human eyes to sort cranberries. Machines bag the berries, but people pack them into the containers to be shipped all over the country.

Like much of the agriculture in the 17<sup>th</sup> District, the cranberry industry is a fascinating combination of technology, ingenuity, science, planning and hands-on, hard work.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to [Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov). Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.