

# Oregon grower delivers first cranberries of the year

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

For the second year in a row, grower Charlie Ruddell of Bandon, Ore., is claiming the earliest delivery of cranberries in North America.

Ruddell planned to deliver the first of 2016's harvest on Aug. 11 to the Ocean Spray co-op receiving station on the Oregon Coast. That's eight days earlier than 2015, which itself was about two weeks earlier than normal.

Ocean Spray spokeswoman Kellyanne Dignan confirmed Ruddell is the co-op's first delivery and said she is confident he's the earliest in North America as well.

"Mother Nature's the boss" on harvest timing, she said.

An unusually warm growing season in 2015 made many crops ready for harvest earlier than normal. Ruddell, of Randolph Cranberries Inc., said other factors are in play this year.

The variety he's growing, Demoranville, blooms earlier and matures faster than other commercial varieties, Ruddell said.

Secondly, Ocean Spray is paying growers a bonus of \$2.50 per 100-pound barrel for cranberries that are lighter color than in years past. A \$2 per barrel bonus is available



Courtesy of Charlie Ruddell, Randolph Cranberries Inc.

A bog of cranberries, flooded and with the berries floating free, stands ready for harvest Aug. 10 near Bandon, Ore. Grower Charlie Ruddell said the harvest is about eight days earlier than 2015. He said the cranberry variety and incentives offered by Ocean Spray are factors in the early harvest.

for cranberries delivered by Sept. 19. If a cranberry bog produces 250 barrels, that amounts to a \$1,125 bonus.

"It sets well with me," Ruddell said.

Dignan, the Ocean Spray spokeswoman, said the co-op's desired color standard has changed over time. Cranberries traditionally were made into juice or sauce, which requires a darker berry.

But now most cranberries are dried and sweetened to make "craisins," and a lighter-colored, earlier berry is preferable, she said.

Wisconsin and Massachusetts rank first and second in U.S. cranberry production. New Jersey is third, and Oregon and Washington are fourth and fifth, respectively. The U.S. usually produces between 8 million and 9 million

barrels annually. The Oregon crop is valued at about \$12 million per year.

Dignan said Ocean Spray will release updated 2016 crop projections soon. Ruddell said his 2015 crop was down 5 or 6 percent from 2014, but might bounce back this year. "My intuition is that we will have a pretty strong year," he said.

## Big cranberry crop seen for surplus-plagued growers

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Cranberry farmers, already struggling with a large inventory and low prices, will produce slightly more cranberries this year than in 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicted Friday.

Growers in Wisconsin, by far the top cranberry-producing state, reported isolated hail damage, but still expect a better-than-average crop because of mostly favorable weather, according to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Meanwhile, Oregon and Washington growers are expected to come close to last year's strong crops.

Overall, USDA forecasts that growers in the five states with commercial cranberry farms will harvest 8.59 million barrels, up from 8.56 million barrels in 2015. Each barrel equals 100 pounds of cranberries.

Bumper crops in recent years, including a record 8.95 million barrels in 2013, have led to a cranberry surplus that has hovered around 90 percent of yearly global demand. Average prices rebounded slightly last year to \$31.60 a barrel from \$30.90 in 2014, but remain below historic levels.

Oregon growers last year produced a record 562,000 barrels. The USDA forecasts a coming harvest of 530,000 barrels, which would be the state's second-largest cranberry crop ever.

Washington produced 198,000 barrels, falling just short of a record yield set in 1994. The USDA forecasts a 2016 harvest of 194,000 barrels.

The USDA predicted harvests will fall in Massachusetts and New Jersey.

Cranberry growing regions in those states are in drought or abnormally dry conditions, the USDA noted.

## Fresno County's production value drops 6 percent during drought

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

Drought was a key factor as the total receipts from Fresno County decreased by more than 6 percent in 2015, an industry insider says.

Farm gate receipts in the county totaled \$6.61 billion last year, down from the \$7.04 billion in 2014, according to county Agricultural Commissioner Les Wright's most recent Crop and Livestock Report.

Water-supply issues were a top concern last year, as were the slippage of some commodity prices and labor shortages, said Ryan Jacobsen, chief executive officer of the Fresno County Farm Bureau.

"It dropped a little bit more than I was probably expecting," Jacobsen said. "It was definitely not going to be the highs we ex-

perienced with the 2014 report."

Fresno County was the nation's top county in agricultural sales in the 2012 Census of Agriculture.

The total value of crops sold was greater than those in 23 states. But the county has since slipped to No. 3 behind Tulare and Kern counties, according to their annual crop reports.

In 2014, Tulare County's \$8.1 billion in total crop value led the nation, followed by Kern County's \$7.55 billion. Fresno had \$7.04 billion in 2014.

Jacobsen has said growers in Fresno County have not been able to produce to their full capacity because of water shortages, including a shutoff of federal water to much of the San Joaquin Valley in 2014 and 2015 and cutbacks in annual allocations in western Fresno County because of endangered species

concerns. About one-quarter of the county farmland has been fallowed because of the drought.

Fresno County growers produced nearly 400 commodities last year, of which 62 exceeded \$1 million in value, Wright told the county Board of Supervisors on Aug. 9.

Almonds were the top crop at \$1.2 billion, followed by grapes at \$896 million, poultry at \$561 million, cattle and calves at \$552 million and tomatoes at \$520 million.

Vegetable crops saw an increase in value last year, rising nearly 5 percent to \$59 million.

But decreases occurred in field crops (42 percent), seed crops (31 percent), fruit and nut crops (6.6 percent), nursery products (25.7 percent), livestock and poultry (9.4 percent), livestock and poultry products (31 percent), apiary (2.4 per-

cent) and industrial crops (54 percent), according to the report.

In addition, two of the county's former staples — pistachios and cotton — fell out of the top 10. Pistachio production took a hit last year because of "blanketing" caused by the drought and a lack of winter chilling hours, and cotton acreage has decreased significantly because of reduced water supplies.

With the water situation having improved somewhat in 2016, Jacobsen said he expects this year's production to hold steady.

"It's so hard because we're talking about such a significantly large number (of commodities), and just one or two major commodities could shift it one way or another," he said. "I would expect it to be relatively flat this year, or maybe a relatively small gain."



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

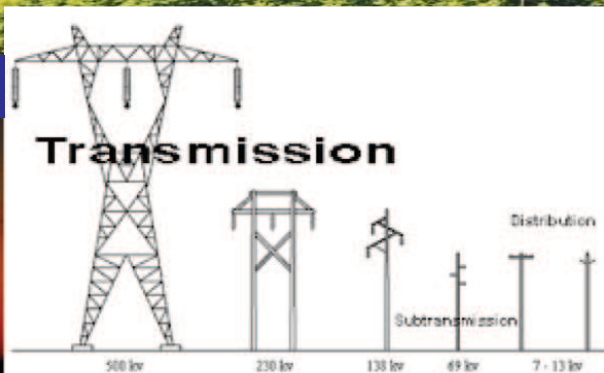
Louie Colombini, general manager of Westside Farmers Cooperative Gin Inc. in Tranquility, Calif., holds a cotton flower while standing in a cotton field in 2015. Once one of Fresno County's most lucrative crops, cotton has fallen out of the county's top 10 in terms of receipts as acreage has been decimated by water cutbacks.

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