



Cranberries at the Heart of Cranmoor

Native Fruit Thrives at Glacial Lake Cranberries

Above: Roy Diver, NRCS District Conservationist; Mary Brazeau Brown, Glacial Lake Cranberries (GLC) President; and Stephen Brown, GLC Vice President, oversee cranberry harvesting at GLC.

Glacial Lake Cranberries, located in Cranmoor, Wis., was established in 1873 by the Arpin family. The property was originally purchased for a lumber business, but the owners found wild cranberries growing and decided to raise cranberries instead. “They built dikes and ditches around the native stands of vines and started cultivating the fruit,” said Mary Brazeau Brown, current owner and President of Glacial Lake Cranberries. Cranmoor is unique, housing 14 cranberry marshes in the township. Most of those started by cultivating native vines from the area. Wood County marshes greatly contribute to making Wisconsin the number one state in the country for cranberry production. Brown’s Grandfather was the Arpin’s attorney and purchased the property with a group of investors in 1923. Mary returned to the property in 1980 and currently owns 6,000 acres. The land includes 330 acres of cranberries, 2,600 acres of forest, and around 3,000 acres in reservoirs that support the cranberry acres. The operation has 96 fruit beds and produces 10 million pounds of fruit yearly. “That’s more than you’ll eat in your lifetime,” explained Mary. She runs the operation with the help of her son, Stephen, currently Vice President of Operations, four employees that live on the property year-round, seasonal staff and help from family.

Mary partnered with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2003, when programs and practices were more applicable and available to cranberry growers. “We needed renovations because it’s an old marsh; some beds were planted in 1939 and needed updating. Those are my heirloom

varieties,” said Mary. As Mary’s older producing beds age, they become more uneven because they were built before laser levelers or modern equipment were available. “To be efficient you need to square out beds, so they are level both horizontally and vertically; that’s been my mission to bring everything up to the best it can be where it’s most efficient to manage,” explained Mary. “We reconfigured some beds and replaced the main pipeline, took out ditches, made beds longer, added new sprinklers, and reconfigured the area to be managed much more efficiently.” Through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Mary was able to install irrigation pipeline, irrigation system sprinklers, and complete irrigation water management. A heavy frost fell in the spring of 2016 and the beds with original sprinkler systems obtained frost damage. “There was no frost damage to the cranberry beds renovated through NRCS EQIP; cost-sharing made Mary’s goals achievable and successful,” said Roy Diver, Wood County NRCS District Conservationist.

Glacial Lake Cranberries was the first marsh to complete a forest management plan and also a nutrient management plan. Mary participates in the NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to manage her forested acres. “I was so glad Roy explained the benefits of the CSP program,” said Mary. For forestry management through CSP, they practice conifer crop tree release to enhance the growth and health of trees, while improving wildlife habitat. “We’re not managing our forests for income, we’re managing our forests for natural succession, wildlife diversity and the best management practices that



Left: Glacial Lake Cranberries employees work to harvest cranberries from a ripe bed. Right: A cranberry bed at Glacial Lake Cranberries before harvest. Below: An employee uses a mechanical rake to loosen the cranberries from the vine. Each berry has a tiny pocket of air that allows it to float to the surface of the water.

will support both of those missions,” explained Brown. “Mary is also progressive in keeping soil healthy on her property, by participating in forest stand improvement,” said Roy. “We watch the timing of our harvest so we are not compacting the soil. The harvesters can’t go in when it’s really wet; we only allow travel in certain areas when the ground is frozen to further protect the soils,” explained Mary. Glacial Lake Cranberries also applies split nitrogen to reduce the risk of leaching and runoff, and to make nitrogen available during critical growth stages. “You do what you know you need to do for sustainability, being proactive about what you can do and what else is out there that’s available for conservation measures,” said Mary.

The importance of conservation and sustainability at Glacial Lake Cranberries speaks for itself. “When you look at a property that’s been commercially producing the same crop for 143 years, you have to be mindful of conservation and sustainability,” said Mary. Brown has a large amount of cranberry support land and she realizes her marsh is part of a bigger conservation picture. “I feel responsible for the land. I’m not just a cranberry grower, I realize I’m responsible as a wetland manager, a forestry manager, for hiking and hunting areas, all this needs to work together; when we conserve it’s about moderating everything you do and it all comes together to define conservation,” said Mary. Brown realizes the value of her efforts in terms of wildlife habitat and diversity also. “Wildlife is abundant on my four miles of land. Every time I see a trumpeter swan or an eagle on the property, all the

migrating birds stopping, it’s really inspirational for me to take care of the land we all need and use,” said Mary. Brown’s son, Stephen, sees the bigger conservation picture to keep the property thriving also. “I see this marsh as a duty and I really enjoy it; it’s what I want to do. We have a really unique operation out here and it takes active management and stewardship to keep it thriving,” said Stephen.

Stephen and Mary realize the value of implementing a conservation plan for their property. “Conservation plans are very helpful; there’s always another way of looking at something and it’s really important to have those conversations. It gives you time to step back and reflect. It’s important to plan your work and work your plan,” said Stephen. “Roy, our local District Conservationist, what a great guy, talk about having a great conversation; he’s always saying, have you thought about this or that? He sees the bigger picture and potential opportunities. NRCS is a team effort, you guys are here to help, it’s voluntary, and we’re working together through a public-private partnership to make a good change for our natural resources; federal resources are really working with farmers,” explained Stephen.

“This property is self-motivating; when you live here, work here, and own it, you feel very responsible for taking care of the land. Whether it’s the sunsets, sunrises, northern lights, the birds migrating through, or the harvest that’s coming in, there’s so many rewarding and motivating things we’ve been blessed with and the partnership with NRCS has been a great part of that,” said Mary.



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