

# SCHOOL NEWS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2004

CARROLL COUNTY INDEPENDENT

## *Community School farms cranberry bog*

TAMWORTH — New Hampshire's first certified organic cranberry bog is a ruby red patch of berries in South Tamworth, the Community School announced this week.

This fall, Community School students harvested more than 200 pounds of organic cranberries on the floor of Carroll County's second largest commercial gravel pit. The school is now marketing cranberries, jam, conserve and cranberry ice cream.

"We like to tell people to eat ice cream and save the aquifer," Community School director Martha Carlson said.

The cranberry farm project is a research collaborative with Ambrose Bros., Inc., owner of the pit. The school and mining company began their research three years ago in an effort to find an organic and safe way to reclaim an exhausted sand pit and to protect the groundwater below the pit.

Last week, the New Hampshire Department of Agriculture verified that the Ambrose cranberry bog and the school's growing methods meet federal and state requirements for organic certification.

"This will be our first cranberry bog," State inspector Janis Conner said last summer when she inspected the pit.

The Ambrose pit was targeted four years ago for reclamation using municipal sludge. The school opposed that idea on the grounds that heavy metals, pathogens and other pollutants in the sludge might travel into the aquifer and pollute nearby wells.

"Municipal sludge is a big industry and cities are powerful politically," Carlson said. "We thought we couldn't oppose the use of sludge for long unless we came up with a viable and smart alternative."

Robert Ambrose, an owner of the pit, Carlson and her students explored the pit to see what grew naturally there when the Ambrose bulldozers finished mining. They noticed that bog plants, orchids, sundew, cotton grass, and wild cranberries, seeded themselves rapidly.

The school experimented with seeding plugs, mats and cuttings of the cranberries. Nature proved better and faster. Three varieties of the berry have seeded themselves on about four acres of the 500-acre Ambrose pit.

Ambrose mowed the natural berries to cut out birch and alder sprouts. Community School board member David White made cranberry rakes for student harvesters. Harold Cook, a blueberry farmer in South Tamworth, loaned the school his winnowing machine. And Sandwich Creamery agreed to make cranberry ice cream

with the school's harvest.

To grow the berries, the school uses no fertilizer, no pesticides, no herbicides. The rakes, mower and winnower are chemical free. Vikki Thelemarck, the school's garden manager, suggested the school apply for state certification of the bog so the berries could be labeled as "certified organic."

"Wild cranberries are prettier and tastier than sludge," Carlson said. "Now that we can label the berries, our customers will know they are helping to protect the environment in an innovative and delicious way."

The Community School will celebrate its cranberry harvest with samples of its crop on December 11, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at a Winter Open House. The public is invited.

The school is located on Bunker Hill Road in South Tamworth just off Route 25 and NH 113 West.

Community School Farms NH's Only Organic Cranberry Bog  
October 2004

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# The Wild Cranberry Community School Story

The Community School began harvesting wild cranberries at the Ambrose Bros. Inc. sand pit last fall. Wild organic cranberries will be on sale this September at our farmstand.

Every cranberry represents a victory for this community in protecting our watershed and aquifer from pollution. The Ossipee aquifer holds enough clear pure water to serve all of metropolitan Boston—if we keep it clean. But the aquifer is threatened by over development, leaky gas tanks, trash dumps, and municipal sludge. Yes, the black goo from the bottom of city sewage treatment plants has to go somewhere. Why not bury it in South Tamworth in the bottom of those ugly old exhausted sand pits?

Municipal recycling experts offer sludge to sand pit owners for free. Rich in nutrients, sludge can grow grass quickly and help sand pit owners reclaim their pits. But sludge also contains heavy metals, pathogens and other nasty things we don't want in our water. And whatever goes into our aquifer next day will eventually be pulled up into our well. Water can move in any direction in a sandy aquifer. Things move through the sand at an average rate of 13 feet a year.

So we've been working with Robert Ambrose to find another way. First, students and teachers lobbied in Tamworth and Sandwich to put moratoriums on the spreading of sludge. Next we went to the sand pit to see what likes to grow on bare sand with no chemicals of any kind, no fertilizer, herbicides or pesticides. We found wild cranberries and other bog plants thriving there happily. Why not encourage them and find a market for them.

Voila! A harvest of ruby red crispy fruit. Delicious raw, cooked, baked or turned into ice cream. Use cranberries raw for a crispy delicious relish, great with heavy holiday meals.

## Raw Cranberry Relish

1 lb, wild cranberries  
2 crisp apples, quartered  
1 orange, quartered  
handful of kumquats, if available  
Toss into food processor and chop finely.  
Sugar to taste.  
Serve at Thanksgiving Dinner.:

## Cooked Cranberry Conserve

1 lb wild cranberries  
1 cup water  
Cook in saucepan until berries pop.  
Process in food blender to soft mix.  
Sugar to taste.  
Hot pack if you want to preserve.

Cranberries can be added to turkey stuffing, quick breads, applesauce and salsa. Substitute wild cranberries for strawberries to make a great rhubarb/cranberry pie. This past summer we asked Sandwich Creamery to try wild cranberry ice cream. It's so delicious, we're ordering more in one quart containers for our the holidays. Order now. Wild Cranberry Ice Cream will be on sale at the Community School at our Winter Open House, \$7.50 a quart. Order now for Thanksgiving or Christmas.

1 lb dry-picked cranberries, \$3.50. Refrigerate. They will stay crispy until the holidays.  
Order wet picked for freezing and baking, 3 lbs, \$8.00.