

Final Project Report - July 1996 through September 1997

ADD Contract #11003 Commercial Lingonberry Production.

Submitted by John and Terry Cuddy
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Project activities for the period July 1996 through September 1997 include out-reach activities, normal maintenance activities associated with the growing season, test plot variety evaluations, planting and preparation work on new lingonberry beds, propagation activities, design, installation, and preliminary evaluation of the shade cloth structure, dealing with a severe outbreak of a fungal root rot associated with very warm moist conditions in July 1997, and preparation of lingonberry beds for winter.

We have provided approximately 18 Lingonberry tours for interested people - over half of these tours were to Wisconsin residents with some interest in growing lingonberries on a small commercial scale. We also had about a dozen mail or email inquiries about the project and spent many hours responding to these requests. We deal regularly with questions about the "Lingonberry Project" from our blueberry and raspberry customers. Many of our regular customers are quite interested in the progress of the project and are looking forward to samples of the berries in the next year or two. Additionally, we have been involved in many requests from media outlets interested in doing stories about the lingonberry project. These range from radio and television to newspapers and tourist oriented publications. Approximately 20 media stories have been generated since the lingonberry project started. This has resulted in both good "advertising" for Rush River Produce and some very good press for the ADD program. Copies of 12 of the printed articles are included at the end of this report.

Normal maintenance of the test plot and commercial production beds has been very labor intensive. These maintenance activities include weeding, irrigating, mulching and related activities. Weeding lingonberries is very important and this activity, for the existing one half acre of test plot and commercial production bed, requires from six to twelve man hours per week. Irrigation must be performed regularly during dry periods and can take an additional one to two hours per week. We learned that irrigation can be overdone - and can cause root rot and plant die off if soils become water logged for long periods of

time. (More information on this in the section on fungal root rot in lingonberries below.) Mulching of the lingonberry plants is important to maintain soil moisture and cool soil temperatures, to promote good soil health, and allow lingonberry rhizomes a friable soil to spread through. Occasionally there are other activities involved in lingonberry bed maintenance. These include bed repair due to erosion from heavy rain, perimeter spraying for weed control, and repair of the shade cloth structure.

Test plot variety evaluations have been conducted on a monthly basis through this period of the study. The study started with 38 varieties of both named and numbered selections from a variety of sources, mostly from Dr. Eldon Stang, of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with others acquired from commercial sources. The total number of varieties increased to 40 in June of 1997 with acquisitions from commercial sources. After the occurrence of fungal root rot in July 1997 the number of varieties declined to 33. Seven varieties having succumbed totally to the root rot. These varieties were generally of lower vigor and performed poorly in the monthly evaluations on most or all scales for the previous year and a half. This means either that they were less vigorous varieties or that they were simply more susceptible to root rot and may have been suffering from low levels of infection all along. A dozen varieties in the test plot have excellent overall characteristics and show good commercial potential under the existing growing conditions at this site. Named varieties performing well include Erntekrone, Koralle, Regal, Sussi, Sanna, Mosovia, and Splendor. Unnamed varieties doing well include C-31-1, C-31-2, C-18-2, C-26-1, and C-26-1. Another dozen varieties show some interesting characteristics, or some promise to perform better with better attention to cultural practices.

A new commercial plot, 50 x 200 ft., was prepared in 1996 and planted in the spring of 1997. 2000 plants of four varieties, Koralle, Scarlet, Erntekrone, and Erntedank, were planted in May, 1997. Mortality of Scarlet and Erntedank was very high due to root rot. Koralle and Erntekrone had much higher survival rates. This bed has been partially replanted. A second commercial plot, 50 x 300 ft., is being prepared for planting in the spring of 1998. Variety selection will be made later in the fall of 1997 when data is tabulated from this summers evaluations.

Propagation activities included digging and planting rhizomes from the better performing plants in the test plot. Approximately 200 rhizome cuttings were taken in the fall of 1996, potted in an acidic growing medium, and kept in a green house over the winter. Approximately 35% of the cuttings rooted successfully and were transplanted into the test plot to augment plant populations in the spring of 1997. The poor success rate was quite possibly at least partially due to root rot in the cuttings, as well as lack of experience of the propagators. This process will be repeated again in the fall of 1997 with the additional step of fungicide treatment at transfer of the cuttings into pots and with an additional application of fungicide at mid winter. It will be interesting to note the results of this treatment.

An additional propagation activity that will be undertaken in October 1997 is the development of a seedling bed. Desiccated and over ripe lingonberries found during the October lingonberry harvest will be planted in a row prepared in the test plot (vacated by varieties that have died out) and grown as seedlings in the test plot. The seedling plants will be evaluated for commercial potential along with the rest of the test plot.

A shade cloth structure was designed and installed in early August of 1997 to cover part of the commercial planting. The variety covered was Koralle. The shade cloth, 30% shade, was installed on a frame of 1 1/2 inch PVC pipe held up by light weight electrical fence posts. The shade cloth was grommeted and tied to short t-posts at its perimeter. Heavy wind bent the fence posts a few days after installation. The structure was reinforced with rope ties connecting the PVC pipe to the t-posts and webbing the PVC pipes to each other. This has worked very satisfactorily with no significant problems from wind damage. The shade cloth was left in place for about seven weeks before removal at the end of September to facilitate replanting the field and spraying with fungicide. While the seven week test is not conclusive there is strong evidence to indicate that the plants shaded for this period were larger and survived and/or recovered from the root rot better than plants of the same variety not covered by shade cloth. The shade clothe structure will be returned to the same section of the commercial bed in late May of 1998 for further testing. An additional shade structure will be constructed over a section of the 1998 commercial planting to further evaluate the concept.

July 1997 was an exceptionally rainy and warm month. At the end of the month moderate to severe dieback was noted in both the test plot and the commercial planting. Approximately 30% mortality and an additional 30% damaged plants were observed in the test plot. In the commercial planting mortality rates ranged from 40% to 80% in different varieties. Specimens were sent to the Plant Pathology laboratory in Madison, WI. Results indicated a pythium root rot associated with water logged soils. Extensive communications were undertaken with plant suppliers, researchers, and plant pathologists to determine possible cures. All resources contacted indicated that our irrigation schedule was too frequent and that, in combination with the wet July, precipitated the acute disease cycle. Spraying with a systemic fungicide, either Ridomil or Aliette, was recommended. Ridomil was applied on 8/15/97 at rates recommended for blueberries. The response of the plants was excellent. The strength of new growth after the application of the fungicide was remarkable and indicates that there may have been lower levels of infection present prior to the acute outbreak in late July. These low levels of pythium infection may have reduced plant vigor and growth during the first part of the project. Growth since the first fungicide application produces longer stems, larger leaves, and more profuse flowering than previously experienced. Two varieties, Erntekrone and Koralle, as well as several numbered varieties, appear to be somewhat, though not completely, resistant to the fungal root rot. Fungicide applications will be repeated prior to winterizing the beds and again in the spring of 1998. It may be that a regular fungicide program will be required for

successful cultivation of lingonberries in this area and/or in heavier soils. Communications from other growers indicate that commercial growers in Germany incorporate regular applications of Aliette or Ridomil in their field management schedules. In anticipation of the possible need for the use of these fungicides we have begun the application process for an IR-4 Minor Use Pesticide exemption to allow the use of these chemicals on lingonberries produced for sale.

The lingonberry beds will be prepared for winter with an additional application of Ridomil fungicide, then the plants will be covered with floating row cover to protect them from cold and desiccation by the winter winds. Snow fence will be installed at the northern edge of the planting, and 25 feet into the bed, running east-west along the length of the bed. Additional snow fence will be installed at the west end of the planting and at 100 foot intervals running north-south as additional snow trap. During the coldest part of the winter from 3.5 feet to 1 foot of snow was trapped on the lingonberry bed by this system. This type of cover and snow trap worked very well over the winter of 96-97 and the plants emerged in the spring of 1997 in very good condition. A late spring freeze (9 degrees) caused some damage to early flower buds and tender new growth. On the whole we are very satisfied with this form of snow fence and row cover winter protection and plan on using this system every year.

Fledgling lingonberry industry gets boost from Rush River Produce

Wisconsin State Farmer
September 26, 1997
Section B Page 12

JANE METCALF

MAIDEN ROCK

If John and Teresa Cuddy have their way, more lingonberries consumed in the U.S. will be grown in the U.S. In an industry where most of the fruit is imported, the Cuddys are fine-tuning production systems not only to help themselves but for other growers as well.

The Cuddys believe they are the second-largest blueberry grower in Wisconsin and perhaps the second-largest current producer in their area. But, when it comes to lingonberries, they are likely leading the country in commercial acreage.

The Cuddys began planting for their Rush River Produce operation 10 years ago and sold their first fruit six years ago. When customers came to pick fruit — and especially if John detected a German or English accent — he would steer them to their black currants, a fruit popular in northern Europe. Those same customers frequently asked if he also grew lingonberries.

At the same time, the Cuddys saw commercial blueberry stock producers offering a limited quantity and variety of lingonberry plants, and they noticed a lot of upscale grocery stores carried lingonberries — with price tags of \$6 to \$8 a pound for frozen berries.

"They're all imported," John explains. "Some people have started growing lingonberries here, but there are no commercial producers (of fruit) in the U.S. yet."

Lingonberries taste similar to cranberries — with usually the same tartness and texture — but they have a light smoky flavor. Smaller than a cranberry, they are more the size of a pea. Plants bear two crops a year — a first crop in August and a second, larger crop in October.

Spurred by what he had observed, John contacted Dr. Eldon Stange, a professor of horticulture at the University of Wisconsin — Madison, in 1995. Dr. Stange had gone to northern Europe in the late 1980s to bring back lingonberry seed stock and, in total, has started between 15,000 and 20,000 plants in test plots. Knowing Dr. Stange was about to leave for Chile for an extended period, John visited his research plot, trying to absorb as much of the elder man's experience as he could in an afternoon. Three days before he was slated to leave the country, Dr. Stange called John and offered him 470 lingonberry plants — plants of his graduate students no longer needed for their research.

"He said it was the second-best collection of lingonberries in the world," John recalls.

The Cuddys now have 42 varieties in their on-farm test plots. This spring, they planted 2,000 plants of four commercially available varieties — Erntekrone, Erntedank, Kiville and Scarlet. Next spring, they will plant an additional half-acre of lingonberries — some of the same varieties and some different.

Helping with the Cuddy's project is an

Agricultural Development and Diversification (ADD) grant from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. Rush River Produce received an \$11,000 grant for 1996 and \$15,000 for 1997. ADD grants are designed to increase the state's agricultural competitiveness, support existing agriculture development and create new value-added production.

As part of that grant, not only will the Cuddys continue their variety research, but they will work on developing a sound production system and share what they have learned with others. They already have given 15 to 20 tours to potential growers, and they will write a book about growing lingonberries.

Lingonberries are related to both cranberries and blueberries, and are often described as an upland cranberry. Plants grow 12 to 18 inches tall. Like cranberries and blueberries, they require an acidic soil — a pH of between 4.5 and 5.5. "Some people would say a pH of 4.5 to 6," John notes. "Our soil is normally between 6.5 to 7. It's good corn, alfalfa and soybean soil."

The Cuddys apply 2,000 pounds of granular sulfur per acre and work it into the soil at least six months before planting. They recommend testing soils twice a year at least and more frequently at first. Lingonberries also require regular irrigation and high organic matter, a minimum of three percent. John notes no one has defined maximum organic matter, but he likes to have the top three to four inches of soil have organic matter ranging from between 30 and 50%.

A perennial evergreen, lingonberry plants need winter protection, so the Cuddys use a floating row cover, plus put up snow fences to trap snow.

"Blueberry experience helps to grow lingonberries," John maintains. "Blueberries take more care and attention, more control of the environment. Lingonberries are the same way."

The Cuddys are experimenting with growing lingonberries under a shade structure.

"When they grow under shade, they grow more vegetatively but have less fruit, so we're going to try to get them to grow more vegetatively for two to three years, then remove the shade," John explains. "Hopefully, it will increase the survival rate of transplants and increase growth, so when it's time for them to begin producing fruit, you'll have a larger, healthier plant."

A native of subarctic regions of the world, lingonberries are found in a few native stands in northern Wisconsin and northern Minnesota. Most commercial production of lingonberries comes from wild stands in Scandinavia and New Foundland.

"My gut feeling is that I'm not in the best place in Wisconsin to grow them," John says. "The best place might be in the snow belt along Lake Michigan... or in parts of the Central Sands area where there is the potential for winter cover or

along the north shore of Lake Superior."

When it comes to writing a growing guide for lingonberries, John will draw on his experience in writing a similar guide for blueberries two years ago.

"When we started out, we knew how to spell 'blueberries' and that's about it," John recalls of his early days in the fruit-growing business. "Later on, we would give tours (to growers and potential growers), and the same questions would come up."

John wound up writing a 143-page book on growing and marketing blueberries and "why on earth you'd want to do this anyway." The book, which has received good reviews from some horticultural publications, costs \$20 plus shipping and handling.

With commercial production of lingonberries several years away, Cuddy still has plenty of time to figure out exactly how he will market the fruit. Retailing them fresh in the Twin Cities is a strong possibility. So is selling them in five- or 10-pound gift boxes or exporting them.

The Cuddys grow seven acres of blueberries, two acres of fall raspberries and half an acre of red and black currants and

gooseberries. John, who works as an environmental consultant and takes a month off work during blueberry harvesting, notes their business is virtually all U-pick. He estimates only three percent of their business is pre-picked and delivered to a few local restaurants.

Rush River Produce is located in Pierce County, 60 miles from St. Paul (MN), 65 miles from Eau Claire and 65 to 70 miles from Rochester (MN). They draw customers from each of the three larger cities, a significantly larger area than most U-pick operations.

"We have a 'wow' site," John says of customers' willingness to drive long distances.

Located at the end of a dead-end road and on a bluff, Rush River Produce overlooks the Rush River Valley. Customers can see 10 miles up the Rush River Valley one way and 30 miles down the Rush River the other. The Cuddys have also done a lot of landscaping, and planted so many of their perennial flowers that bloom during blueberry-picking season.

"We figured a long time ago that we're as much ag tourism as we are berries."

John says. "We have the serious pickers who come to pick 20 to 30 pounds of blueberries or raspberries, but a little over 50 percent of our pickers are families who come out to pick 10 pounds of berries and let the kids run around. We're kid friendly... It's a nice place to visit."

For more information about lingonberries, write to John and Teresa Cuddy, Rush River Produce, W4098 200th Avenue, Maiden Rock, WI 54750 or call (715) 594-3648 or e-mail at CUDDY@WIN.BRIGHT.NET.

WISCONSIN

Farmers hope berry venture goes wild

■ Couple hope lingonberries are viable commercial crop

ASSOCIATED PRESS

MAIDEN ROCK, WIS.

John and Terry Cuddy are adding 500 lingonberry plants to the crop line at their Rush River Produce farm and hope to sell the berries commercially in about five years.

"There are no commercial lingonberry growers in the country at this time," John Cuddy, 49, said as he cleared hay from some of the small berry bushes now planted in a temporary nursery area at the farm high in the hills overlooking Lake Pepin. "They mostly grow wild all over in the higher latitudes. In fact, this is pretty much the southern limit for them."

Terry Cuddy, 39, said the berries — which are related to cranberries and sometimes are called mountain cranberries, foxberries or partridgeberries — primarily are used as an ingredient or flavoring rather than as an eating berry.

"Lingonberries are really popular in Norway and Sweden for jellies, syrups, sauces, things like that," she said. "There's a Scandinavian Christmas rice pudding that's usually made only with lingonberries. It's like cranberries and turkey for us."

The smallish, tart, red berry is only available frozen in the United States. Most are imported from Europe.

"The Norwegians and Swedes are paying eight bucks a pound for them frozen over in the (Twin) Cities right now," John Cuddy said. "If I can sell them for six bucks a pound fresh, I'll be a happy farmer."

The lingonberry plant is a low evergreen that spreads by putting out suckers. The Cuddys have 34 varieties they will transplant, after which they will determine which varieties to use in their commercial plantings.

They received the plants from Eldon Stang, a former University of Wisconsin-Madison scientist who had collected samples during trips to Europe.

"He'd just wander through the woods,

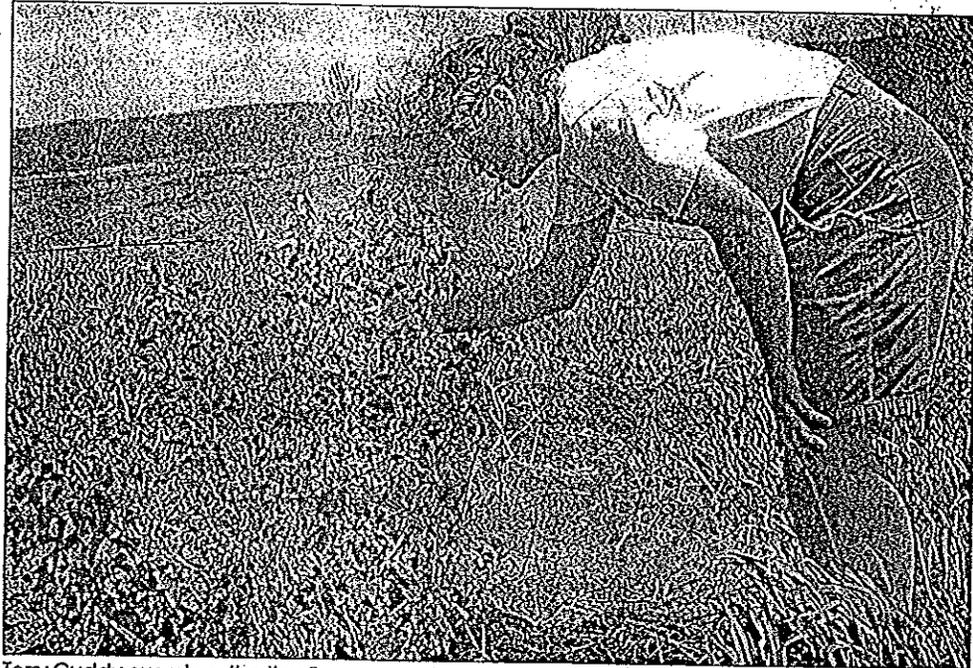
see a plant and say, 'Well, this one looks large and healthy, and it has a good berry, and it tastes good. I'll take some of this,'" John Cuddy said. "He said at one point he had 11,000 different plants from different sources. This selection of 34 varieties was from the best of those."

The Cuddys saved the lingonberry collection from the compost pile when Stang left the university to take a job with cranberry growers in Chile.

The plants also grow wild throughout Canada and are especially popular in Eastern Canada.

Adding an unusual berry to their produce line isn't unusual for the Cuddys. Their farm, which is a summer and fall pick-your-own destination for popular blueberries and raspberries, also sports more exotic offerings, including apricot trees; black, red and white currants; gooseberries; garlic; and perennial flowers.

"We'll sell cut flowers, and sometimes if somebody sees a plant they like, I'll go get a pot and dig it out for them," Terry Cuddy said.



Terry Cuddy examines the tiny flowers on a berry bush at Rush River Produce. By mid-July currants and blueberries will be ripe and ready for picking. Judy Wiff photo.

Hudson

Star-Observer

Thursday May 29, 1997

Patience, help of friends pay off in berries at Rush River Produce

Story and photo by: Judy Wiff

MAIDEN ROCK—The currant bushes are in full bloom now, and the tiny blueberry flowers are blossoming.

Neighbors have brought in boxes of bees to help with pollination, and two Saturdays ago 37 of Terry and John Cuddy's friends gathered for three hours to plant 2,000 lingonberry bushes.

In late May, Rush River Produce is alive with promise.

By late summer the farm, overlooking the Rush River Valley, will be busy with customers picking their own berries.

In the first years, production was measured in baskets, said Terry Cuddy. Last year the berries were better measured in tons.

Terry grew up in Minneapolis, and John in New Jersey. They met in Minnesota and lived in California for several years before deciding to return to the Midwest.

They bought a 160-acre farm just outside Maiden Rock. Corn had been the main crop, and the Cuddys still rent out 80 tillable acres. But they decided berries would be a better crop for some of the hilly land.

They started by planting an acre of half high Northblue berry plants in 1987. During each of the next three years, they planted another

acre. It takes years to establish blueberry bushes and by the time the Cuddys planted their 4th acre, they were just starting to get a few handfuls off their first planting.

"We do all the planting by the gather-all-your-friends-together method," said Cuddy as she led a tour of the 10 acres of berry bushes.

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"We do all the planting by the gather-all-your-friends-together method."

— Terry Cuddy

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 This year the farm will offer blueberries, raspberries and black, red and white currants. The Cuddys hope to soon add summer raspberry, lingonberry and gooseberry crops for the picking.

Cuddy said she stocks about 100 5-gallon pails as stools for pickers. She also provides picking boxes and carriers.

The half high blueberries will ripen in mid-July. The 3-year-old high bush blueberries will ripen in mid-August and some varieties will produce through September.

"The flavor is tremendous," said Cuddy, enthusing about the taste of fresh-picked berries.

The Patriot variety produces a berry nearly as large as a quarter. "It's such a mouthful of flavor," said Cuddy.

Generally the first fruit is the largest and as the season dwindles, the berry size also diminishes, said Cuddy.

She has a mailing list of about

2,000 and sends out postcards when about a third of the blueberries are ripe. Blueberries can stay on the bushes ripe for about five days. Waiting until she's sure the crop is ready assures customers of plenty of berries, said Cuddy.

Raspberries will ripen at about the same time as the blueberries. That's a pleasant coincidence because the two combine nicely for both jam and pie, said Cuddy.

The currants, while not common in Western Wisconsin, are familiar to those raised in Europe, said Cuddy. "One Romanian Lady was so taken with these white currants, she was in 7th heaven."

Cuddy makes currant scones. Her husband makes chutney. "We both love the currant jam that we make," she said.

She described the flavor of the black currants as "musky" and said there's nothing better than black currant jam on toast on a cold winter morning.

"It's nothing you can really rush into," said Cuddy of her business. Currant bushes don't really begin bearing fruit until they're 3 years old. Blueberries take 3-5 years and reach their prime at about 7 years.

The Cuddys invite parents to bring their children, and the couple encourage picnicking. Terry even points out the trail leading to a hill that gives a spectacular view of Lake Pepin.

Customers are allowed to eat berries while they pick. "That's part of the joy of U-pick," said Terry.

For information about the farm, call 715-594-3648.

THE PILOT

(A guide and companion piece to Wisconsin's Great River Road Booklet)

Wisconsin's Great River Road



*America's Greatest
Undiscovered Drive...
250 Miles Of Beauty.*

*Chosen The #1 Scenic Drive
In Wisconsin By
Wisconsin Trail Magazine,
April/May 1997 Issue*

**ISSUE #1
1997**

Malden Rock - Rush River Produce (watch for the sign) is just a few miles east of Malden Rock but transports you half-a-world away to Scandinavia. Their specialty is berries and their newest plants are the only lingonberries being grown commercially in North America. The lingonberry is a close cousin of blueberries and cranberries. It grows wild in Sweden and Norway where it is coveted as a fresh berry, a jam berry and for preserves. The Cuddy family found themselves in a truly Swedish area between Stockholm and Lund, Wisconsin and had heard that this country imports 20,000 lbs. of lingonberries a year. It was also hard to ignore the yearning recollections of the older Swedish immigrants for a taste of home. Mr. Cuddy was able to obtain a complete collection of 465 plants from the University of Wisconsin when a special study was discontinued. Since then, the Cuddy family has found about twenty varieties that do well here and hope to have a picking crop in a couple of years. They have also found that the plants do better if you shovel snow on top of them... as much as possible!

FREE • Take One



Great River Road Village Journal

Summer 1997

A Country Journal with unique Tales and Traditions

Rush River PRODUCE

We try to keep things humming at Rush River Produce. As part of the job of growing the finest small fruits: blueberries, raspberries, currants, and lingonberries, we have to pay attention to bees. Not just the familiar honeybee - although we rent a dozen hives of honeybees every year to help in the big job of pollinating those millions of small blueberry blossoms. We also do our best to encourage the native wild bee populations that really do most of the pollinating work for all our crops. This year we have built a dozen small bumble bee motels, high class bee houses designed with the bumble bee in mind. We also have built nesting habitat for the orchard mason bees, a small solitary bee that is much busier than your average honey bee when it comes to pollinating blossoms in cold or windy weather. Then there are the flowers - everywhere, all summer long - a continual feast for the bees and your eyes. At Rush River Produce we do our best to be educational and fun for the whole family. Bring along the kids for a day at the farm, picnic areas are available. While you are there you will also enjoy the spectacular views of Lake Pepin, and the Rush River Valley, and the beautiful perennial flower gardens.

With the late cold spring this year our blueberry season will probably start mid July. Black, White, and Red Currants, taste treats that everyone should try, should be ripe in early blueberry season. While you are at Rush River Produce don't forget to get some locally produced honey and maple syrup.

Rush River Produce is located just 3 miles off Highway 35, Wisconsin's Great River Road, outside of Maiden Rock, WI. Please call (715) 594-3648 for picking information and directions. The berry farm is a scenic one hour drive from the Twin Cities, Eau Claire, or Rochester areas. For your convenience, they are open seven days a week, 8 a.m. until dark. "We provide the boxes, you take home the harvest."



**BLUEBERRIES
and
CURRANTS**

U-Pick

Open 7 Days a Week
8 a.m. til Dark
3 miles from Maiden Rock, WI
Call for directions & availability!

715-594-3648
RUSH RIVER PRODUCE



From Novice To Expert

This husband-and-wife team learned the blueberry business from the ground up — and survived to write about it.

By Al Sray

TEN years ago, John Cuddy and his wife Terry didn't even have enough fruit growing experience to be considered novices.

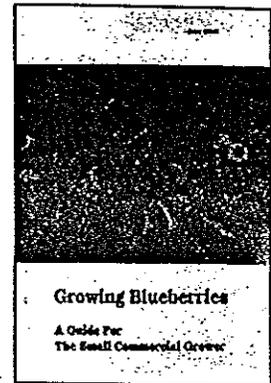
If there were a rung below novice on the fruit-growing ladder, they would have been on it. Luckily for them, however, that lack of knowledge did not translate into a lack of desire to learn. Their desire, combined with a willingness to gamble on a worn-out Wisconsin dairy farm, was enough to transform the Cuddys' dreams into reality.

Their operation, Rush River Produce, currently has 7 acres of blueberries, along with 2½ acres of fall raspberries, and several other types of small fruit such as currants and lingonberries. It's safe to say they are novices no more.

Trial and error was all the Cuddys had to go on in setting up their operation. They learned from their numerous mistakes, says Terry. After all, what choice did the couple have? There was no instruction manual to tell them how to go about setting up their pick-your-own (PYO) fruit business.

Putting Pen To Paper

As their initial venture into the world of agriculture would indicate, the Cuddys aren't the type of people who sit around and dream. They prefer to take action. The lack of any type of real-life how-to information on the subject of blueberry growing prompted them to write a book for first-time growers. They wanted to help people avoid some of the pitfalls they had to overcome in developing Rush River. The end result? *Growing Blueberries, A Guide For The Small Commercial Grower*. "There is quite a lot of technical-type literature out there written



by professors and university-type people," John says. "Those are informative and helpful. But we wanted to focus on our story. It's a little bit more practical."

The book focuses on the whole story, not just the positives. "I wanted it to be a realistic assessment of what people could expect if they wanted to get into something like this," he says.

The book is especially honest when it comes to the bottom line. They don't make any extravagant monetary claims about PYO blueberries. "Potentially, it's a fairly lucrative business," he says. "But one of the big difficulties with blueberries is that it's five years before you see any fruit. That means five years before you can get people onto the farm buying the product. It's not a quick, easy buck."

Terry agrees. "It's a huge outlay," she says. "We've been throwing lots of money into the dirt for years and years. And just now, after 10 years, we are finally starting to see a return. With all that can go wrong, it can be a real crap shoot."

The idea for the book came to John while giving tours of Rush River to potential PYO growers, who asked similar questions on each tour.

John wrote those questions down and then turned each one into a

(Continued on page 14F)

Rush River Produce receives lingonberry research grant

Malden Rock

To most people in this part of the world, the tiny, red lingonberry means nothing. Most have never seen one, let alone tasted one.

But to many northern Europeans, Canadians and Japanese — as well as Americans of Scandinavian descent — the tart lingonberry is a popular holiday treat, used in baking sauces, jams and jellies.

John and Terry Cuddy of rural southern Pierce County hope to bring more attention to the cranberry-like fruit. The Cuddys operate Rush River Produce, which overlooks Lake Pepin.

This summer, the couple received an \$11,000 grant from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's Agricultural Development and Diversification Program.

The grant, which extends over 18 months, is to be put toward developing hardy, productive lingonberry varieties for

Wisconsin and enhancing production of this rare berry.

Already, the Cuddys have a good start. They have 500 bushes in the ground and expect their first, small harvest in 1997. "We may have a few next year," Mr. Cuddy states. "It's kind of chancy."

The slow-growing lingonberry bush takes several years to mature and yield noteworthy crops.

A portion of the Cuddys' bushes came from Eldon Stang, formerly of the agricultural research station in Hancock. The Cuddys visited him two years ago before he moved to Chile, and they came home with 34 varieties to add onto the 8-10 they already had. Some of the varieties came from as far as Sweden.

"We could have them, he said, because we showed interest in growing lingonberries," Mrs. Cuddy said. This gives the Cuddys one of the last and largest collections of lingonberries in North America.

Only one other person grows lingonberries in Wisconsin, near Stevens Point, the Cuddys say. Although that grower has about 10,000 plants, they are not being grown commercially. Some Michigan growers do offer lingonberries.

Today, there are about 30 acres of lingonberries under cultivation in the world, mostly in Germany and Scandinavian countries. Most varieties are taken from the wild.

"The situation's real similar to where blueberries were 100 years ago," Mr. Cuddy explained. Ninety-eight percent were picked in the wild, he said.

Then people got interested in propagating them. That's, hopefully, what's going to hap-

pen in the next 5 to 10 years with lingonberries."

The Cuddys, who expect an increase in the number of small growers of lingonberries, are located on the southern edge of where lingonberries can grow naturally in the world.

They hope to be breeding lingonberries in 5 years and, eventually, phase out of raspberries to grow up to 2 acres of lingonberries on a specialty order basis.

"Fresh lingonberries would be a treat for Scandinavian cooks," Mrs. Cuddy said. And they fetch a high price — up to \$8 per pound. A 3-year-old pot-tered lingonberry plant costs \$8 to \$10.

In the daily care of the plants, the Cuddys have been encouraged by what they have seen so far in the beds.

The plants provide berries even at extremely small heights, and it is "heart-warming" to see

roots reaching out from the mother plant. Lingonberry plants spread by rhizomes — kind of like quackgrass — to form a "carpet" of bushes," Mr. Cuddy said.

Bushes yield anywhere between one-half to 1-1/2 pounds of berries per 18-inch length of row. More of a horizontal plant, they grow only to about one foot in height.

There are two crops, one in late July and a larger one in late September. A good indication that they are ready to yield is when the tops nod over, Mrs. Cuddy said.

"Every variety is a little bit different," she notes, adding that a good variety is vigorous, with good color. The Cuddys can also tell by the time and amount of flowering.

As part of their research, the Cuddys perform numerical grading of the plants once each month and give "one through five" scores in each of various categories. "Right now, I'm looking for the vigorous ones," Mrs. Cuddy said.

For care, lingonberries — which are in the same family as cranberries and blueberries — require snow cover and need slightly more water than blueberries.

They must be hand harvested with a special rake, are shallow rooted and favor porous soil. Every few days, they must be hand weeded. No chemicals have been approved for lingonberries. "A lot of our work is weeding and mulching," Mrs. Cuddy said.

The Cuddys have incorporated about 100 cubic yards of tree shreds at \$5 a cubic yard into the soil, as lingonberries need a high organic matter content. They top-dress with sawdust from a



Photo by Heidi Clausen

Anticipation

For years, John Cuddy and his wife, Terry, have anxiously awaited the growth of their first lingonberries and are delighted to see a few tiny red fruits emerging this year. The couple will receive an \$11,000 grant to research lingonberry varieties for Wisconsin. They hope to have their first real crop next year.

"It's a long-term investment in labor and land," Mr. Cuddy said. "If the research that we've read and the experience we've had turns out to be fairly accurate, it's going to be kind of like the blueberry. Over the long term, the notion is that this will be another specialty crop."

Rush River Produce is the largest blueberry truck garden in the Midwest. The Cuddys operate 160 acres — 10 irrigated acres — where they grow and sell blueberries, black-red and white-currants, raspberries, gooseberries and day lilies, as well as an experimental crop of black raspberries.

"Nobody really knows," Mr. Cuddy said. "We're given only the nature of the botanical family. But there's a lot of openness in the world. We're on the cutting edge."

"It's a long-term investment in labor and land," Mr. Cuddy said. "If the research that we've read and the experience we've had turns out to be fairly accurate, it's going to be kind of like the blueberry. Over the long term, the notion is that this will be another specialty crop."

Photo by Heidi Clausen

Heidi Clausen

Produce firm funded to develop lingonberries

MAIDEN ROCK--Rush River Produce of Maiden Rock has received a grant from the Agricultural Development and Diversification Program, Wisconsin DATCP, to accelerate the development of commercial Lingonberry production in Wisconsin.

Lingonberries are eaten during holidays in Northern Europe, Canada, Japan, and in the United States among

people of Scandinavian heritage. They are extensively used in baking, sauces, jams and jellies.

Lingonberries are a slow-growing berry plant and take several years to mature and produce large crops. There will be a small crop of Lingonberries in 1997, with production increasing each year thereafter.

Lingonberries...

Maiden Rock couple brings Scandinavian treat to Wisconsin

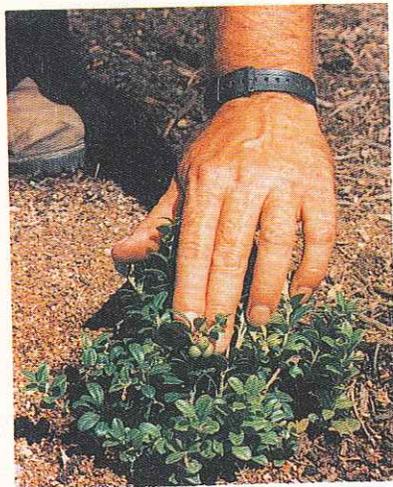
You can find virtually any kind of berry you could possibly want at Rush River Produce in Maiden Rock. Owners and operators John and Terry Cuddy grow them all: blueberries, raspberries, black currants, lingonberries....

Lingonberries?

That's right, lingonberries. If you haven't heard of them, don't feel bad—you're not alone. Lingonberries are not typically found in Wisconsin. In fact, they're not typically found anywhere in the United States; there are no commercial producers of lingonberries anywhere in North America.

But at Rush River Produce, located just a few miles off the Great River Road on Pierce-Pepin Electric Cooperative's lines, one of the largest collection of lingonberries in the world is being nurtured under the Cuddys' watchful eyes. The Cuddys expect to have some commercial beds ready within the next couple of years.

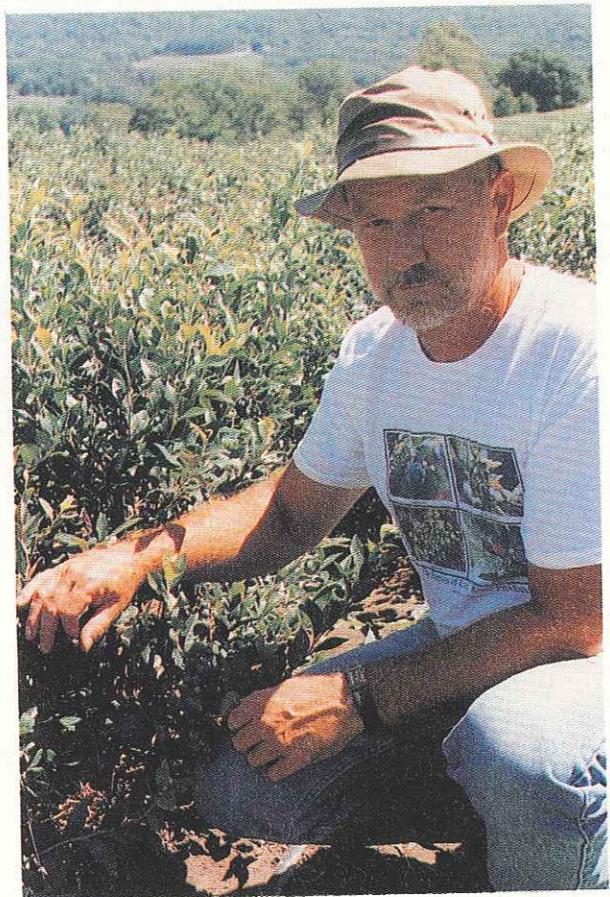
"They're kind of a tricky thing to grow, but quite a few showed some good growth last year," said John Cuddy. "It's an experiment, but I think we can grow them."



What's a lingonberry?

Lingonberries are a small, cranberry-like fruit—actually a relative of blueberries and cranberries—found mostly in

The Cuddys' 50x 100-foot lingonberry test plot contains plants from around the world, including Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Denmark, Germany, Russia, Quebec, and Sweden.



Already successful with blueberry production, John Cuddy (pictured here with his blueberry crop) and his wife, Terry, hope to find a market niche with lingonberries.

northern European countries, with some in northern Asia and Canada as well. They are as beloved a fall and winter holiday treat to Scandinavians as cranberries are to Americans.

"Norwegians, other Scandinavians, and even the Japanese are quite enamored of them," Cuddy said.

Although popular in their native lands, lingonberries are not widely distributed there either. Most are picked in the wild. Cuddy said there are only about 30 or 40 acres of lingonberries under cultivation in the entire world.

"Lingonberries are about at the same stage blueberries were 100 years ago," Cuddy explained. "People ate them, but they came from the wild."

Lingonberries require acidic soil and a lot of water to grow. They also thrive with a heavy snow covering during the winter months.

How did they get here?

The Cuddys obtained their collection of lingonberry plants from Dr. Eldon Stang, a researcher at the University of Wisconsin, in 1994. The Cuddys had moved to Wisconsin from California, where John was an environmental engineer, about 10 years ago because

(Continued on page 13)

Lingonberries

(Continued from page 8)

they wanted to switch to country living and raise their children in a rural setting. They had originally planned to try growing ginseng, but they found success with blueberries instead; Rush River Produce is now the second largest blueberry grower in Wisconsin.

Always looking for something different, the Cuddys had read some literature about lingonberries from blueberry suppliers. The couple contacted Stang, who had been researching

Lingonberries are as beloved a fall and winter holiday treat to Scandinavians as cranberries are to Americans.

lingonberries and was trying to find a grower in Wisconsin who would try producing them. When the Cuddys contacted him, Stang was preparing to leave for Chile, where he was going to help producers there grow cranberries. The Cuddys visited Stang and examined his collection of plants, which consisted of 34 different varieties from 12 different countries—the second-best collection in the world.

Then, in the fall of 1994, three days before Stang was to leave for Chile, he called the Cuddys. "He said, 'I've got a couple hundred plants that are headed for the dumpsters. Do you want them?'" Cuddy said. "We picked them up at 7:30 the next morning—465 plants."

How are they doing?

Last year, the Cuddys removed some of their plums to make room for a test plot of lingonberries. They spent the summer evaluating the different varieties and determining which were most promising for development into commercial beds.

"About two-thirds of them seem to like Wisconsin just fine, which is better than what I thought we'd do," Cuddy said.

Coaxing the plants into growing in a land that's quite different from their maritime native homes takes a lot of work. The Cuddys buy shredded trees by the truckload to imitate the organic, acidic soil the plants require. The plants also require frequent irrigation; last summer's scorching heat required irrigation every two or three days. And although this past winter provided lots of snow, lingonberries are used to much more.

"To get a reliable plant, you must protect the last growth from winter burn," Cuddy explained. "Nature does that by snow covering. We'll put row fabric down and a snow fence around them. The best would be to put row fabric down after 6 to 8 inches of snow cover."

Some Wisconsin conditions should be an advantage for the Cuddys; the berries' season is

much shorter in their northern homelands.

"They get confused by the day length here, so we should get two crops a year," Cuddy said.

What's in store?

Although most Wisconsin residents are unfamiliar with lingonberries, there is a market for them in the Twin Cities area, where they are sold either frozen or as preserves in specialty stores. Cuddy said Newfoundland and Norway import 20,000 pounds of the preserved fruit a year; however, fresh lingonberries are not available commercially in the U.S.

The Cuddys hope to eventually have 1 or 2 acres of lingonberry plants—yielding 10,000 to 20,000 pounds of berries a year—sometime within the next several years. John explained that lingonberry plants need two to three years to fully mature, and a full four or five years before they yield a significant crop.

By providing fresh lingonberries as a pick-your-own fruit or by mail order, the Cuddys can expand the existing market and introduce this unique fruit to Wisconsin.

"Already, I've had some calls from some older ladies from Norway and Sweden who get choked up telling me how they picked wild lingonberries when they were children," Cuddy said.—*Mary Erickson*

If you're planning your summer activities, make room in your itinerary for a stop at Rush River Produce, where you can pick your own berries as well as enjoy a spectacular view of Wisconsin's Coulee Country.



blueberry hill

After spending too much time in urban America, John and Terry Cuddy of Rush River Produce tastefully combined country living and an interest in agriculture for some very fruitful results!

You hear a lot these days about the changing role of agriculture in today's economy. Diversity is the key, the experts say, and open-mindedness is essential. Creativity in farming should therefore thrive in a climate where the growing season tends to be short but fruitful.

Along the lush hillsides and rich coulee valleys of Wisconsin's Great River Road, diversity is not just the subject of idle talk. Determined to prove that with a little hard work, research, and help from some friends they could succeed, at least one family is diversifying, and doing it quite nicely.

John and Terry Cuddy of Maiden Rock's Rush River Produce are growing blueberries, raspberries, lingonberries, apricots, black currants, garlic, perennial flowers and a variety of other fresh garden produce on a hilltop overlooking the river valley and Lake Pepin. Berry pickers can have a day well spent on the grounds of Rush River Produce, surrounded by a Garden of Eden of growing things. They might also find they've experienced a little piece of heaven.

The Cuddys haven't always lived the rural life. Terry was born and bred in Minneapolis, and once felt most comfortable in an environment of concrete, buses and taxis. When she met John, who is from New Jersey, they were both working in construction. Together they moved to the central

valley of California, where they worked for a windmill-building firm. The pair admired the area's orchards, famous for the produce we buy throughout the year. The seed was sown; they became interested in growing their own produce.



Eugene O'Keefe

When their involvement in the windmill business ended, the Cuddys decided to leave the Golden State for familiar Midwestern turf. In 1986, they bought a 160-acre farm just northeast of Maiden Rock in Salem township, Pierce County. At first they considered growing ginseng, but quickly changed their minds and settled on berries. Blueberries, in particular, would be their specialty.

"In 1987 we planted blueberries, and have added more each year," says Terry. "We decided to plant blueberries for a few reasons. They were unusual. No one else in the immediate area grows them in large quantities. And we happened to find a hearty variety with plants that live to be 25 to 35 years old."

Currently, the Cuddys cultivate four acres of half-high North Blue and North Country blueberries, which were recently

developed at the University of Minnesota to grow well in cold climates. At full height, the plants are about three feet tall. Last year the Cuddys planted three acres of highbush variety blueberries: Patriot, Bluecrop, Nelson and Elliot. While both the half-high and the highbush produce plenty of berries, Terry says the highbush can be easier to pick, because they require less bending down.

To make every berry picker at Rush River Produce more comfortable, the Cuddys provide buckets to sit on and a wire carrier lined with a cardboard box. As the berries are picked, they are placed into the container, then weighed.

Berries are sold by the pound, at a price slightly less than retail.

More than 8,000 blueberry plants now cover the hillside at Rush River Produce.



Teresa Cuddy

The Cuddys plan to nurture and develop their operation each year, staggering the production as the bushes begin to bear fruit three to five years after the initial planting. Their newest endeavor includes growing as many as 600 plants and 34 varieties of lingonberries, which are similar to blueberries in their cultivation and care, but have a specialized market in both Europe and



BY MARY CATON-ROSSER

North America. A few acres of raspberry bushes also flourish on the hilltop. The combination of berries allows for a picking season from July until frost.

To manage the soil's acidity, the Cuddys add sulfur, reducing its pH level. Because the bushes thrive in ground with a rich organic content, they also mix the soil with particles of shredded trees. They water the plants using drip irrigation, with tubes positioned every 12 inches along the rows of bushes. No toxic sprays are used on the berry plants as they bear leaves, flowers or fruit. Resistant to disease and insect pests, the berries require damp soil and full sun for good production. All this knowledge has not come overnight, however. The Cuddys have fine-tuned their operation through experience, experimentation and research.

Rush River Produce officially opened in 1991, initially selling u-pick berries only on evenings and weekends. In 1992, John and Terry decided to tackle the project full-time, with the help of sons Joseph, age 6, and Lucas, age 3. "The accent here is on great produce and family fun," emphasizes Terry. "It has been a real adventure and a family affair. The boys love company, entertaining customers' kids, sharing their toys and tearing around the yard. They have become quite the blueberry salesmen, too."

HOW TO PICK AND STORE FRESH BERRIES

STRAWBERRIES • Pick red, ripe berries with their caps and stems. Keep strawberries cool; don't leave them in a hot car or direct sunlight – refrigerate immediately. Store in shallow containers; do not remove the caps until ready to use or process. Use within 3 days.

RASPBERRIES • Pick into shallow containers. Ripe raspberries will separate easily from the plant. Handle gently and refrigerate immediately. Do not wash until ready to use or process. Use within 1-2 days.

BLUEBERRIES • To pick, hold the cluster in your hand and gently roll your thumb over the berries; ripe berries will separate from the plant. Sort out twigs and leaves prior to refrigerating. Do not wash until ready to use or process. Will keep in refrigerator up to two weeks.

The Cuddys encourage families to bring a picnic lunch when they come to pick berries. Aging oaks and cottonwoods provide shade for picnic tables at Rush River. Joseph and Lucas tend a lemonade stand, while visiting children can enjoy a tire swing, tepee, hammock, tetherball and other toys, all of which add to the friendly atmosphere.

Although the Cuddys will pre-pick blueberries on request, most of their customers pick their own. "We encourage in-row quality control," says Terry. "The only way for the customers to tell how good the fruit is, and what variety they like best, is to test it out." When asked what people should bring with them when they pick, John answers, "Lots of times you are in the direct sun while picking, so a good hat is not a bad idea." Other recommended items include jeans or shorts, T-shirts, tennis shoes and sunscreen.

The Cuddys also offer their customers suggestions on freezing their fruit and supply recipes for delicious eating year-round. Adds Terry, "You can't get too much of a good thing." Especially when it's fresh berries picked from a beautiful hillside. ■

Rush River Produce is located three miles off the Great River Road (Wisconsin Highway 35). From Highway 35, take County Road A two miles north to 420th Street. Turn left onto 420th Street and climb one mile, turning right at the top of the hill onto 200th Avenue. Go a quarter mile to the end of the road. Look for the signs posted along the way. Rush River Produce is open from early July until the end of September, seven days a week, rain or shine, from 8 a.m. until dark. Call (715) 594-3648 for more information.



THE GROWING SEASON

The following is a list of registered berry and produce places in western Wisconsin.

THE BERRY PATCH • Rt 1 Box 1550, Trempealeau, WI (608) 539-2202 or (608) 539-5541. Mid June - Oct. 31. Eight miles west of Galesville or eight miles east of Winona, MN, on Hwy 54 & 35. Asparagus, gifts, gourds, honey, melons, nuts, pears, plums, pumpkins, squash and strawberries.

CAIN'S ORCHARD • Rt 2 Box 106, Hixton, WI (715) 963-2052. Mid July - mid Oct. Just off I-94, 1/2 mile east of Hixton on Hwy 95. North on Branch Road, 3/4 mile to Cain Road. Apples, apple cider, apple products, blueberries, grapes, honey, pears, syrup, tours and wagon rides.

FIRST MIDSTATES PRODUCE CO. Rt 2 Box 2105, Spooner, WI (715) 635-2620. One mile south of Spooner Golf Club on Ojibwa Road. Asparagus, beans, bedding plants, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumbers, eggplant, melons, peppers, raspberries, squash, sweet corn and tomatoes.

HWY VIEW FARM • W10692 Hwy 8, Ladysmith, WI (715) 868-6378. Five miles west of Ladysmith on Hwy 8, or three miles east of Bruce. Asparagus, beans, beets, onions, peas, potatoes, pumpkins, strawberries and sweet corn.

PARADISE VALLEY FARM • Rt 5 Box 25A, Menomonie, WI (715) 235-9467. One mile west of Menomonie on Hwy 29 to Cty. P, follow the signs. Apples, baked goods, blueberries, dried flowers, gourds, Indian corn, pumpkins, squash and strawberries.

SCHWERTEL'S ROADSIDE STAND • Rt 1 Box 1545, Trempealeau, WI (608) 539-4154. Six miles west of Galesville, or 10 miles east of Winona, MN, on Hwy 54 & 35.

The farmer's markets in the following cities offer shoppers the opportunity to buy fresh, locally grown produce.

Black River Falls	(715) 284-9111
Clintonville	(715) 823-4606
Eau Claire	(715) 839-0011
Frederic	(715) 327-8887
Hudson	(715) 386-8974
Ladysmith	(715) 532-6532
Menomonie	(715) 235-5088
Neillsville	(715) 743-2650
New Richmond	(715) 246-4086
Rice Lake	(715) 234-2126
River Falls	(715) 425-2533

It's A Berry Good Life at Rush River Produce

John and **Terry Cuddy** just decided "to take a chance" 10 years ago when they started what would become Rush River Produce. And after planting an acre a year since the start, they now own and run one of the largest produce farms in the area.

"And the fun is just beginning!" she said. They have about 8,000 blueberry plants containing berries ripe for you, family, and friends — young and old — to pick. On 4 acres, the "half-highs" grow. "Half-highs" come in the north blue and north country varieties. Ninety percent of the "half-highs" are north blues which are a hardier hybrid of the low-to-the-ground wild blueberries and the high bush variety that the University of Minnesota developed. The "half-highs" also require a hardier picker — willing and able to bend down to reach the bushes that are only mid-height.

But luckily, for those of us who would rather not have to stretch and bend, there are 3 acres of the high bush blueberries (patriot, blue crop, Nelson, and Elliot varieties). These plants can be 4 to 6 feet tall and easier to pick.

As the blueberry season, which runs from mid-July to early August, winds down, the Cuddy family's 2-1/2 acres of raspberries are just getting ripe. The raspberries should be ready to pick from mid-August until the first September frost. The Cuddys both have taken classes from the University of Minnesota in fruit sciences. Terry also is a graduate of the master gardener course. They run Rush River Produce without any hired help. They do get some help from their friends, when the Cuddys have their annual "planting party" each spring.

They also have a loyal following of berry enthusiasts. People come mostly from southeastern Minnesota, the Twin Cities and western Wisconsin, but also from farther away. Because, as Terry said, "People are willing to drive long distances for

good berries."

The Cuddys encourage people to making berry picking a family adventure. Pickers of all sizes — children to grandparents — are welcome. When people arrive, they are given a wire carrier filled with boxes and then sent to the field where they can "eat a pound and maybe pick a pound." There are also 5-gallon pails scattered around in the fields for pickers to use as seats. Simply move a pail next to a favorite bush as you rest, eat, or even pick some berries. Or you can go for a quick walk to the top of the farm to stretch and enjoy the view overlooking Lake Pepin.

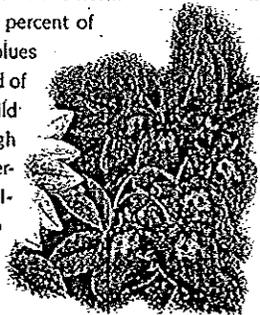
Also available seasonally are apples; black, red and white currents; perennial flowers; garlic; tomatoes; locally produced honey; maple syrup; raspberry jam. The Cuddys' new book, "Growing Blueberries, a Guide for the Small Commercial Grower," also is sold at the farm.

Next year, the Cuddys hope to add the tart and tiny lingonberry to the list of berries available for picking. Planted only last year, the lingonberry should reach maturity in 1997. Gooseberries and early-bearing raspberries also are coming soon.

The Cuddys' two sons, Joseph, age 7, and Lucas, age 4, seem to have some entrepreneur genes passed down to them. They run a lemonade stand, set up between the cool shade trees and picnic tables where worn-out and stuffed pickers can rest with a refreshing drink.

Rush River Produce is located south on Highway 35 in Wisconsin between Bay City and Malden Rock. Three miles north of Malden Rock, turn onto County Road A, and then "just follow that sign." The farm is open 8 a.m. to dark, seven days a week, but hurry, Terry said, because "the season is ripe!"

-Sara Martin



Where to go to pick your own

There are so many reasons to buy locally-grown products. There's nothing like biting into a juicy slice of a "Big Boy" tomato right off the vine. There are few things closer to perfect than popping a still sun-warmed strawberry into your mouth.

Local farmer's markets, pick-your-own places, roadside stands, and even trucks parked in front of the Court House tempt the palate this summer. Local grocery stores also have a selection of locally grown products during the high season. If you're eager to get it straight from the source, here's a list of local spots to find it.

They do the hard work for you
Bushel & Peck Market,
Lake City (612) 345-4516



Raspberries, sweet corn, all types of summer fruits and vegetables, tree-ripened apples and peaches, gladiolus cut daily. Open 9 am to 6 p.m.

You can do the work
Rush River Produce
Malden Rock (715) 594-3648

Berries, currants, apricots, honey and maple syrup. Overlooking Lake Pepin and Rush River Valley. Located three miles off Highway 35, Wisconsin's Great River Road, outside of Malden Rock.

Flower Valley Orchard,
Red Wing (612) 388-2148

Two miles east of Red Wing. Featuring 24 glorious varieties of apples, fresh cider, famous pies and crisps, maple syrup and honey, and some pick your own.

Frontenac Hills Apple Farm,
Red Wing (612) 388-7422

Apples, cider, pumpkins. Open on weekends from noon to 6, Sept. - Oct.

Rainbow Ridge Farm,
Wekoh (612) 437-7837

Strawberries, blueberries, raw honey, jam. Playground for small kids. Picnic tables. Call for picking information, or if you want to come anytime. Regular hours are 8 a.m.

to noon and 4 to 7 p.m.
Sherry's Berries,
Ellsworth (715) 273-3170

Strawberries, raspberries, vegetables. You pick or packaged. County Road C, south of Ellsworth to V, then north on 690th St. to the farm.

Oak Ridge Orchard
Lake City (612) 345-4371

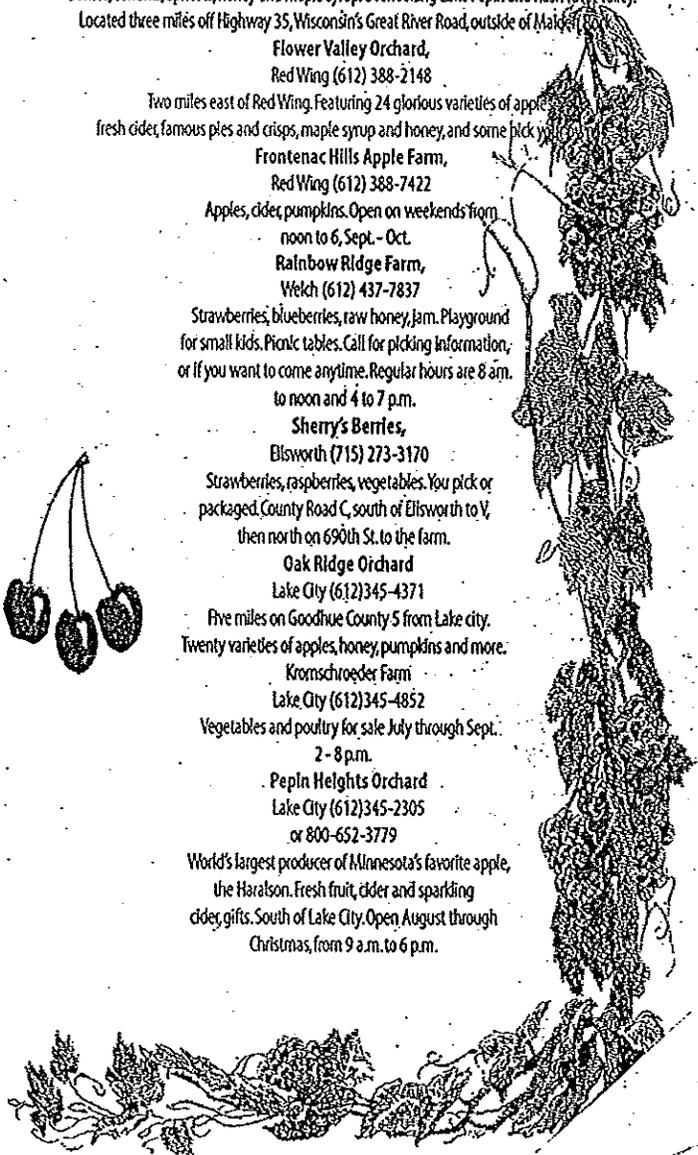
Five miles on Goodhue County 5 from Lake City. Twenty varieties of apples, honey, pumpkins and more.

Kromschroeder Farm
Lake City (612) 345-4852

Vegetables and poultry for sale July through Sept. 2-8 p.m.

Pepin Heights Orchard
Lake City (612) 345-2305
or 800-652-3779

World's largest producer of Minnesota's favorite apple, the Harabon. Fresh fruit, cider and sparkling cider gifts. South of Lake City. Open August through Christmas, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.



A Soft Weekend Drive through riotous fall colors

BY BILL FARMER

American bald eagles hang-glide between the bluffs of the Mississippi River at Minnesota's Lake Pepin each autumn, seeking prey and occasionally spotting one of the big stern-wheeler steamboats that churn their way to St. Paul.

This is where Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau vied for the affections of Ann Margaret in *Grumpy Old Men*. And it is the setting for a final chapter of Mark Twain's epic travelogue, *Life on the Mississippi*. Twain called it "incomparable Lake Pepin... a picture whereupon the tourist's eye may gaze uncounted hours, with rapture unapposed and unappeasable." He wasn't exaggerating.

Start 60 miles southeast of the Twin Cities. Drive along either the Wisconsin

shore on state Route 35 or the Minnesota shore on U.S. 61. Each route hugs the majestic hills that tower nearly 600 feet high and are often capped with rock cliffs. Hardwood forests and sumac show off a fireworks display of fall color. Orchards and roadside stands, particularly along the Minnesota side, sell dozens of varieties of apples. The landscape is interrupted every few miles by long, narrow villages that cling to the bluffs with sturdy, brick-and-stone architecture of a bygone 19th-century, river-based economy.

For a day-trip, cross the river at Wabasha, Minn., and return on the other side for a different perspective. Another unhurried day is needed to tour both sides of the river downstream to Winona, Minn., and back.

Visitors don't expect to see pleasure sailboating on the Mississippi, but the river widens to more than 2 miles to form a lake. Hundreds of sailboats, fishing boats and cruisers anchor at the marinas.

The peak of the leaf-change in late September and early October attracts regional tourists. The migration of American bald eagles usually starts in November and can last until late March.

"Hundreds of bald eagles use this migration corridor," says Steve Kittelson of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. They are joined by migrating hawks, ospreys and turkey vultures, as well as ducks, Canada geese, herons and egrets that follow the Mississippi flyway. Lake Pepin's bluffs offer some of the world's best and most accessible eagle-sighting opportunities. An observation platform is located at Rieck's Lake Park north of Alma, Wis., and an Eagle Watch observatory is on the shore at Wabasha.

At Maiden Rock, Wis., drive 2 miles north on County Road A up the valley of the Rush River trout stream to the Cuddy family's bluff-top Rush River Produce for a view of both the Rush and Mississippi basin color, with 70 percent of it aglow in yellow and orange sugar maples, as well

Continued on page 18

FRIENDLY EXCHANGE / FALL 1996

Continued from page 15

as an eastern slope of red oak.

John and Terry Cuddy raise blueberries and raspberries. Patrons can pick raspberries into late September.

"We are cultivating one of the best collections of experimental lingonberries in the world," says John Cuddy. These rare, ruddy delicacies grow wild in the sub-arctic climate of Scandinavia. They have not been successfully domesticated in the United States until now.

The lingonberries will be right at home. The village of Stockholm, Wis., is less than half-an-hour away, clinging to an Old World heritage with its Jenny Lind Cafe and Deli and the Amish Country Quilts and Furniture that features hand-crafted items from the region.

At Pepin, Wis., you can visit the 1867 birthplace of Laura Ingalls Wilder, author of *Little House on the Prairie* and other books on frontier life. There is a replica of the Wilder family's log cabin 7 miles northwest of Pepin on County Road CC. The town celebrates Laura Ingalls Wilder Days in late September.

Twin Cities foodies willingly drive the winding roads for an hour-and-a-half to Pepin just to eat at the Harbor View Cafe, one of the friendliest eating places along the Mississippi. At First and Main streets, it is off Route 35 two blocks and overlooks the broad lake. The casual atmosphere and chalkboard menu belie some really serious cooking, with hints of the tangy cuisine of New Orleans permeating the entrees.

The blufftop Buena Vista Park at nearby Alma, Wis., takes

you 500 feet above the river for a spectacular view in a park where black walnuts, hickory nuts and chestnuts hide among the autumn colors.

On the Minnesota side, the bluffs harbor larger towns like Wabasha, Lake City and Red Wing, and the route is punctuated by apple orchards, antique shops and fine old hotels and inns.

With an estimated 45,000 trees, Pepin Heights Orchards, at the south edge of Lake City, is Minnesota's largest apple orchard with what is touted as the world's largest crop of Haralson apples.

Lake City has four lakefront parks and a Johnny Appleseed Days celebration the first weekend of October. A Wild Wings gallery sells wildlife paintings and prints by some of the nation's finest artists.

Red Wing, 60 miles from the Twin

Cities, is home to the now-defunct Red Wing Pottery and the adjacent Red Wing Pottery Mall with 32 shops that sell pottery, stoneware, chinaware, collectibles and antiques.

The historic St. James Hotel, built in 1875, is lovingly restored in Red Wing's business district. Many of its 60 rooms overlook the river. During peak leaf season, you should book four to six months in advance.

And so it goes from town to town and village to village. A chance to discover a bit of history here, a touch of lore throughout a typical Midwestern river valley in the fall.

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