

STORIES of New Jersey

Another problem is that of forest fires. Since many of the bogs are in woodland, and the vines are combustible, a system of fire lines or burned-off strips is employed to protect them. The ordinary methods of fighting forest fires are used when flames threaten the bogs.

Harvest begins in early September and lasts until late October. Entire families, men and women, young and old, spend the season in the fields. They are housed in makeshift shelters provided by the owners. Most of them are Italians. They are paid on the basis of the quantity of berries picked. As each box is filled the picker receives a ticket which represents so much money and is accepted as currency in the stores in the vicinity.



Scooping cranberries

Pickers are assigned to certain places and are held responsible for that section. A group of four or five pickers may be assigned to a strip one rod wide. Eight to 12 such groups are supervised by a foreman, who walks up and down between the strips to see that the plants are picked clean and that few berries are dropped on the ground. Unless the picking is carefully supervised as much as 25 percent of the crop may be left on the vines by the workers. The pickers must work hard and fast during the brief season to make their employment profitable enough to meet their needs.

The method of keeping track of the harvest is simple. If 30,000 bushels of berries are to be picked in 40 working days it means that 750 bushels must be picked daily. With a force of 200 or 250 pickers the average is three to four bushels. As the picker presents a filled box he receives a numbered ticket. If the first ticket issued in the morning is No. 569 and the last one at night is No. 1,232 the grower knows that 663 measures have been harvested.

Recently a new method of picking, called scooping, has changed the labor problem on the bogs. A cranberry scoop has steel teeth so arranged that the operator can comb through the vines, catching the berries in a box-like compartment. It is a heavy tool that requires handling by men. An ordinary laborer using a scoop can gather six to 12 bushels a day while an expert can average 20 bushels.

The scooping method, used on more than half of the bogs in New Jersey, reduces the cost of labor and saves in housing and supervision. But there are disadvantages. More berries are dropped to the ground, and the vines are often damaged. Some growers have tried paying on an hourly basis instead of by piece rates. This slows up the work somewhat, but makes it more thorough.

Cranberries should be picked and handled only when dry and should be kept at an even temperature during storage. A temperature of 34 to 40 degrees is