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Taste: From their bog to your Thanksgiving dinner

By [Special to The Oregonian](#)
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Courtesy of Gretchen Farr
Gretchen Farr and her husband, Randy, of Clearwater Cranberries, stand knee-deep during harvest.

Gretchen Farr and her husband, Randy, are cranberry farmers in Port Orford. They are part of a growing collaborative of farming families who have adopted sustainable growing practices within their bogs and wetlands.

This time of year, Gretchen can sometimes be found armpit deep in water collecting berries for us to relish during the holidays. Recently, Gretchen talked about what it's like to farm the crimson berry and shared her favorite cranberry treats.

Q: How are [Clearwater Cranberries](#) unlike big-brand berries?

A: We offer transparency and traceability. We are certainly not the only cranberry growers who are dedicated to environmentally responsible growing practices, but we have joined together because we believe that people value knowing how their food is grown.

Q: Is there a difference between cranberry farmers and other produce farmers?

A: Cranberry vines are perennials that grow in bogs, so we don't replant every year or use cover crops the way farmers with annual crops do. But one thing's for sure: We all work long hours during the peak growing and harvest season.

Q: What should a consumer look for in a cranberry?

A: For fresh berries, make sure that they are firm, with no soft spots. Generally, the darker the berry, the "sweeter" it is -- if you can call a cranberry "sweet." Oregon cranberries also have a longer growing season than East Coast cranberries, making them larger, darker and riper when harvested. Oh -- and if you bite into a cranberry and the seeds are brown, it's ripe.

Q: What does a good cranberry taste like?

A: Tart. Believe it or not, they do get "sweeter" the longer they stay on the vine. You'll notice dried cranberries are sweeter still, and that's because they're marinated with some form of sugar or fruit juice. It will be great when there's a [Food Alliance](#) sweetener available, but for now we use cane sugar.

Q: What is the most uncomfortable thing about harvesting cranberries?

A: Picture me on a cold, windy day, bundled up, in waders, sloshing around in the water, helping Randy. He's beating the bog and I'm gathering the berries.

Q: Do you have a favorite cranberry snack?

A: If you asked our bog workers, they'd probably say the homemade trail mix we make with dried cranberries, pine nuts, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds and [Sunspire](#) sun drops (milk chocolate in a candy-coated shell). It's quite a hit!

Q: Finish this sentence: If I were a cranberry ...

A: ... I'd be happy at harvest time because I love to swim, and there I'd be, floating and bobbing around in the water.

Clearwater's fresh cranberries are available at [New Seasons Market](#) (various locations).

-- [Sara Perry](#)

Grand Central Bakery's Cranberry-Apple Chutney

Makes 2 quarts

When cranberry farmers Gretchen and Randy Farr come to Portland, they head to Grand Central Bakery for lunch and a turkey sandwich, spread with this savory-sweet chutney. It's terrific with chicken or pork, too.

1 tablespoon olive oil

2 medium red onions, diced to make about 1 2/3 cups

2 teaspoons finely minced garlic

1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger

2 cups fresh cranberries

3 to 4 medium heirloom or favorite seasonal apples, peeled, cored and diced to make about 5 cups

1 1/2 cups firmly packed brown sugar
1 1/3 cups apple cider vinegar
2 teaspoons mustard seeds
1 1/2 teaspoons ground allspice
1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste
1/2 cup golden raisins
1/2 cup currants

Heat the olive oil in a large, nonreactive pan over medium heat. Sauté the onions until soft and translucent. Add the garlic and ginger, and sauté until fragrant, 2 to 3 minutes.

Add the cranberries, apples, sugar, vinegar, spices, raisins and currants; increase the heat to medium-high and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, for about 45 minutes or until the cranberries and apples have cooked down and the sauce has thickened. Taste and adjust seasonings as desired. To store, place cooled chutney in an airtight container and refrigerate for up to 10 days. (Let sit in refrigerator at least six hours or overnight to let flavors blend.) The chutney can be frozen.

-- Adapted from
[**Grand Central Bakery**](#)