

Berries have migrated from marshes to fields

Poleskie Zhuraviny JSC gathers huge crop of cranberries this year



Contemporary technologies help pick cranberries, but much still depends on human efforts

By Vasily Veniaminov

Belarus' largest farmstead, usually employing around 70 people, has completed its harvesting of autumn berries. During the busiest season, the number of employees rises, with an extra 150 workers hired to pick cranberries. It's hard work but is well paid. In fact, 90 percent of the proc-

ess is mechanised, which makes the harvest more efficient. The human element remains vital however.

"Each season is special," notes Vasily Lyagusky, the Director of Poleskie Zhuraviny JSC. "This year, we needed special technologies to limit damage from the winter thaw. The harvesting season is nearing its end now, and we're already seeing good

results: the bunker weight stands at 330 tonnes of berries. They need to be washed and sorted but the final figure should exceed 300 tonnes (up from just over 200 tonnes last year)."

Large varieties of this healing berry were brought to Belarus from America 25 years ago. Now, local cranberries rival those in the USA

and Canada. Almost half the volume is exported to Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and the UK.

High quality Poleskie Zhuraviny goods are also sold domestically, with sales peaking in November. There were so many wild cranberries in the woods this year that many people have picked their own of course.

Seeing and assessing

By Svetlana Savicheva

Ukrainian journalists impressed by modernisation of enterprises and social infrastructure of towns during press tour of Belarus

The Ukrainian journalists were particularly amazed by Snov Agrobusiness, which boasts the latest technologies and good labour conditions. The agro-town also has well-developed social infrastructure.

The journalists were keen to discover avenues of co-operation between enterprises from Belarus and Ukraine. Ukrinform News Agency's Vitaly Sich asked about MAZ JSC's plans regarding the expansion of its presence on the Ukrainian market and the opening of an assembly plant there. He noted that his agency often has stories concerning Belarus and Ukraine's close collaboration in the socio-cultural sphere but was eager to know more about our economic ties.

The three day tour of Belarus ended with a visit to the Republican Scientific and Practical Centre of Organ and Tissue Transplantation, allowing the journalists to see the latest equipment and to chat to Ukrainians currently there as patients.

Journalists were present from regional editions, as well as from *Kievsky Vestnik*, *Fakty i Kommentarii* and *Segodnya* newspapers, and from Ukrinform News Agency. They were joined by camera crews from several TV channels, visiting leading Belarusian enterprises, the National Academy of Sciences' Institute for Microbiology, and the Chief Military-Clinical Medical Centre of the Armed Forces of Belarus. They even visited Nesvizh, seeing its newly restored castle, Farny Catholic Church and the famous Town Hall.

Uncompromising renters still run the show

Anticipated fall in rental rates fails to occur

By Darya Melekhova

Those in rented flats and students in hostels had been hoping that rents might fall in October but this now seems unlikely, despite the stabilisation of the exchange rate of the Belarusian Rouble and the appearance of foreign currency in free access at exchange offices.

Access to US Dollars and Euros has slightly reduced prices, with the average rental in October being almost the same as it was in August, according to Tvoya Stolitsa Real Estate Agency. In late summer, one roomed flats were being offered at \$204 per month, but have now risen to \$207. Two roomed flat are down to \$265 from \$286 while three roomed flats are currently being rented for \$321 rather than \$329. The prices generally include all utility bills.

Traditionally, the cheapest housing is located in the suburbs, with one roomed flats situated within a 10-15 minute drive of main streets costing around \$150 monthly. Those in good repair and including furniture can fetch



Rented accommodation is always more expensive in the centre

\$200 or more depending on their distance from a metro station. The price of two roomed flats varies

from \$200 to \$250 while prices for three roomed flats start at \$250. The latter are usually viewed by

young people seeking to flat share, with each having their own room.

Those who anticipated housing prices falling are likely to be pleased but experienced specialists warn against too much optimism regarding prices. "Since the beginning of the year, many changes have occurred on the market," notes Svetlana Zygmantovich, the Head of the Rental Department at Novoselie Real Estate Agency, sharing her observations. "In most cases, tenants are still calculating using the old US Dollar-Belarusian Rouble exchange rate."

"We set the prices ourselves, adjusting them to demand," explains Yelena Aleinik, who heads Molnar Real Estate Agency's Rental Department. "However, some stubborn residents would rather lose money than drop prices, leaving their flat to stand empty for a month."

According to specialists, when access to US Dollars was lost, landlords reduced prices. Now, almost half are insisting on payment in foreign currency. Of course, those seeking rented accommo-

dation may be able to negotiate during a personal meeting. "Landlords aren't really looking at the personal characteristics of their tenants but advance payment deposits and guarantees of payment in foreign currency. Where these can be agreed, 30 percent arrange to reduce prices," reveals Natalia Radenya, the Head of Tvoya Stolitsa's Rental Department.

Even specialists disagree on how the situation may develop. Ms. Zygmantovich believes that rental rates will depend on salary growth while Molnar Real Estate Agency's Yelena Aleinik doubts rents will fall until the new year. She explains, "They'll remain at their current level and may even rise provided the US Dollar stays stable," explains the specialist.

Tvoya Stolitsa Agency has the most optimistic forecast. "By the end of the year, prices should fall by another \$20. Moreover, by February, demand should have fallen," notes Ms. Radenya. "The situation currently observed is a result of rents being out of kilter with salaries."