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Developing Commercial Elderberry Production in Minnesota

Project Title: Developing Commercial Elderberry Production in Minnesota

Coordinator: Christopher Patton

Location: Marine on St. Croix, Minnesota

SARE Grant: \$14,890

Duration: 2013-2014

To read the full project report, go to www.sare.org/projects and search for project number FNC13-925



*Christopher Patton and the Minnesota Elderberry Cooperative help potential growers evaluate elderberries as a hobby or business crop.
Photo by Paul Otten.*

Elderberries are a rapidly growing specialty crop in the Midwest. They have multiple functions in a cropping system because they are perennial, ornamental, a wildlife food source, and they can be planted in low-lying wet areas as a buffer. They can be used to produce value-added products like jams, jellies, wines, and juices.

Christopher Patton is the Founder of the Minnesota Elderberry Cooperative, which intends to function as a dependable, primary connection between the independent elderberry grower and the marketplace in Minnesota.

In 2013, Christopher Patton, Dan Moe, Loren Nickelson, and Paul Otten (the four producers that formed the Minnesota Elderberry Cooperative) applied for an NCR-SARE Farmer Rancher grant to contract with Cooperative Development Services (CDS) to conduct market research on the potential for profitable elderberry product markets in Minnesota.

Under market conditions in Missouri, experience-based projections suggested that growers could earn \$500-6500/acre net return. The group wanted to know whether the experiences of elderberry production in Missouri could transfer to Minnesota.

Over the course of the project the group held several meetings with Cooperative Development Services about their market and feasibility study, discussed grower education and outreach, and discussed membership structure and benefits for the Minnesota Elderberry Cooperative.

The feasibility study was completed in 2013, and it favorably assessed the potential profitability of elderberry cultivation, processing, and marketing of ingredients in Minnesota.

“Not only can elderberry provide an additional income stream to farmers, but can help land owners manage land and water resources, and provide support for pollinators and wildlife diversity,” said Patton. “Local food, beverage, and health supplement companies will benefit from locally sourced, higher quality elderberry ingredients to replace European imports. The public benefits from increased access to a traditionally used wild berry with a reputation of delivering a high level of health benefits.”

In 2014, Minnesota Elderberry Cooperative members produced, processed, and sold over 1,000 lbs. of frozen and fresh elderberries as well as dozens of pounds of flowers. Minnesota Elderberry Cooperative members also conducted successful training in proper harvest and processing methods and began development of quality control.

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