

Direct Marketing Non-Traditional, Perennial Berries

Project Titles: Direct Marketing Non-Traditional, Perennial Berries

Coordinators: Claire Hintz

Location: Herbster, Wisconsin

SARE Grants: \$17,530

Duration: 2016-2018

To read the full project reports, go to <https://projects.sare.org/> and search for project number FNC12-864.

Berries are considered high-valued specialty crops; that means berries can earn higher returns per unit of land than could be achieved in more traditional agricultural products (Sobekova, 2013). Claire Hintz, Rachel Henderson, and Erin Schneider own and operate farms in Wisconsin, where they each grow berries; each is particularly interested in non-traditional berries.

“People expressed a desire for more fruit in our CSA boxes and at our local farmers’ markets,” explained Hintz, “Yet they don’t fully understand what berries such as Saskatoon are, let alone how they are priced.”

The three Wisconsin Farmers received SARE support to learn more about non-traditional berries. They focused their project on elderberries, currants (red, white, black), honeyberries, and Saskatoons. To get a better handle on producing these varieties, the team worked to figure out investment costs, return on investment, and labor requirements.

Using surveys and other customer feedback, they learned that once consumers were familiar with the fruits, they were willing to pay a fair price—\$5 per pint, generally. When the specialty berries were coupled with education and tasting experiences, customers were



Erin Schneider (left), Claire Hintz (center), and Rachel Henderson (right) received SARE support to expand crop information about non-traditional berries.

willing to pay an average of \$7 per pint. Ultimately, each producer found a way to sell products best suited to their markets and their farms. Hintz found opportunities to sell fresh berries at her farmers market located on the south shore of Lake Superior, Schneider dove into selling processed fruit, jams, and juice near Madison, and Henderson took her syrups and juices to the Twin Cities in Minnesota, where the market for her currants is strong.

“We were able to determine a better system for pricing and producing fruit,”

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said Hintz. “Also, these fruits complement our existing production and help us manage increasing risk associated with extreme weather conditions.”

She added that growers considering nontraditional fruits might want to build a base market for fruits first. “It may make more sense to start with more readily accepted fruit (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, apples, etc.) and then expand to these varieties,” said Hintz.

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