

Elderberry Marketing Basics for Growers

Market Status – Industry overview, markets by region and by product, competition

Over 95% of the elderberry used in America is imported from Europe. From coast to coast, Americans are asking for and buying locally produced foods. Increasingly, consumers want to know where their food and drink comes from, how it was grown and how it was processed & packaged. America has less than 1000 acres of commercially grown elderberry, while Europe probably has over 50,000 acres of commercially grown elderberry and much more is wild collected.

In the broadest sense, European competition is well established and present in many products both as a primary and secondary ingredient creating established demand and some consumer education. The predominance of European imported elderberry concentrate and freeze dried powders by default provides the opportunity for the favorable differentiation of “localness” for any American grown elderberry. Furthermore, European elderberry is typically used in highly processed forms for targeted nutraceutical or supplement purposes. The mass handling and processing of European elderberry provides an advantage of lower cost, but that is offset by overseas shipping costs and restricted product diversification. Locally grown elderberry is in a much better position to contribute to the explosion in locally grown and processed foods and beverages.

Native American elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) have a greater variety of antioxidants compared the European (*Sambucus nigra*) according to some published sources. (MEC website) Wild collected elderberry is not dependable or documented.

Objectives & Strategies

- Target Markets – Customer Segments
 - River Hills Harvest Brand – closer, more established buyer/processor, elderberry juice based products
 - Norm’s Farms – SE regional presence, variety of products based on or containing elderberry
 - Local retailers -
 - Consumer direct through farmers’ markets and on-site sales
 - Herbalists – teas, tinctures, extracts
 - Hobby brewers: wine, beer, mead, kombucha
 - Berry enthusiasts: jams, jellies, traditional recipes
- SWOT – from the perspective of, and related to the specific grower
 - Established family familiarity, traditional uses of native elderberry
 - Increasing knowledge and support for beginning commercial growers
 - Ability to scale up producing acreage in tandem with growing demand
 - Opportunity to separate and positively document acres of varietal plantings
 - Different varieties evidence differing biochemical qualities
 - Acidity, brix, relative proportions of the various antioxidants and vitamins
 - Future market development will likely lead to varietal preferences
 - Providing varietal documentation will likely justify price premiums
- Key Purchase Criteria – documented in accordance with USDA & FDA requirements
 - Documented proper harvest with fresh de-stemming and sanitation, prompt freezing
 - Pesticide free, cultural approach in pest control, IPM documentation
 - Naturally, sustainably grown, ground not forced or over fertilized
 - Certified Organic
 - Identified elderberry varieties: Adams, Bob Gordon, Johns, Ranch, Wyldewood, York, etc.