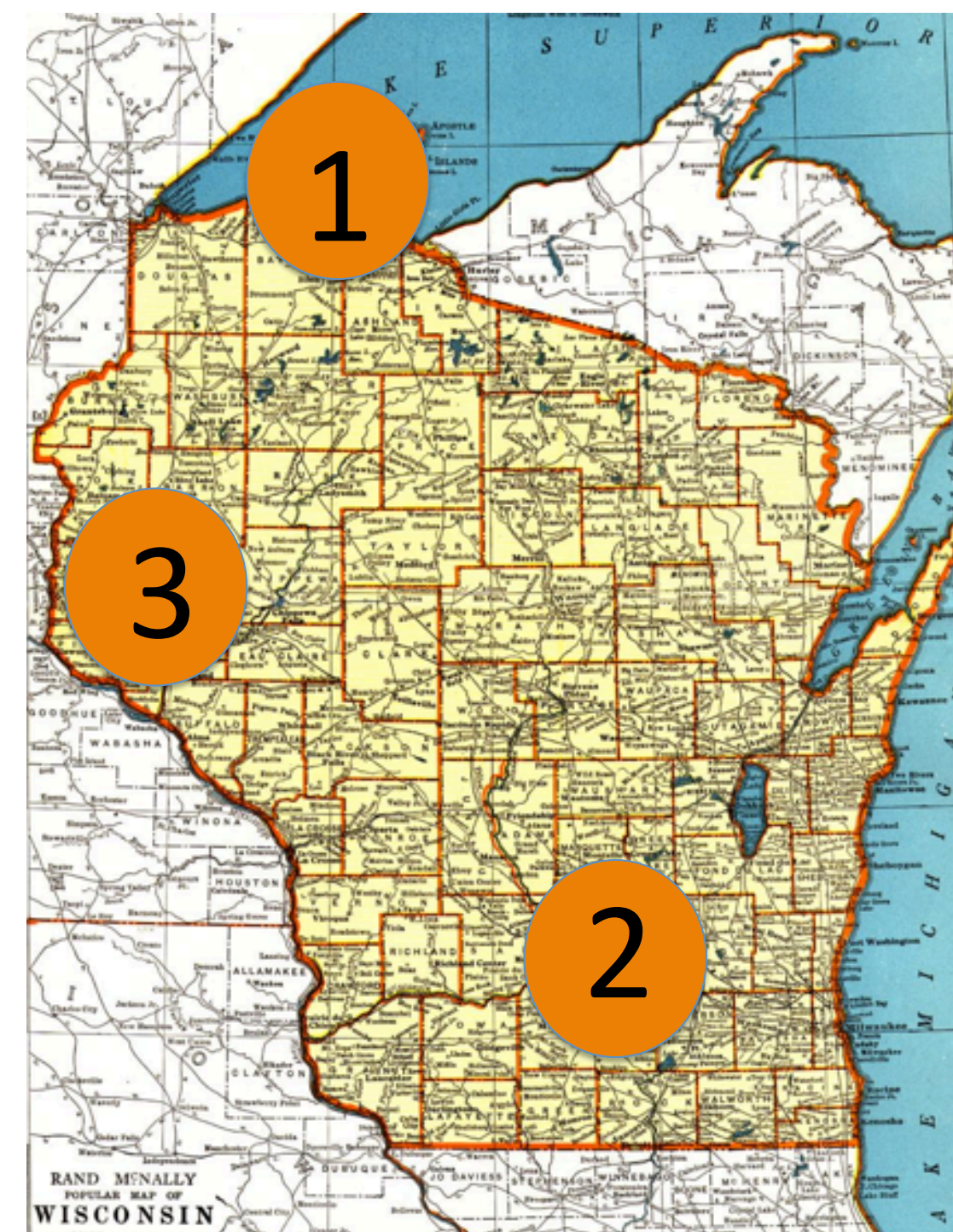


Direct Marketing Non-Traditional Perennial Berry Varieties: Expanding Eater Preferences and Grower Connections

Clare Hintz¹, Elsewhere Farm, Herbster, WI
Erin Schneider², Hilltop Community Farm, La Valle, WI
Rachel Henderson³, Mary Dirty Face Farm, Menomonie, WI



http://mulligansoup.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/f3e8aa76e4fd231973_pcm6iyerx.jpeg

Summary:

Our SARE-funded research focused on ways to expand the markets and local awareness for elderberry, currants, saskatoon (Juneberry) and honeyberry. Most consumers surveyed had heard of currants and elderberries, very few had heard of honeyberry, with saskatoon falling somewhere in the middle. Survey respondents valued local, sustainably grown fruit, for the most part wanted the farmer to earn a fair wage (though price had the most varied response) and relayed that taste, having recipes and storage tips were very important to accessing these fruits. Most survey respondents indicated an average of \$5 per pint or product of fruit. Respondents who participated in a tasting and then gave feedback on price indicated they would be willing to pay a higher price range of \$7 - \$9 per pint. Final products of the research will include an enterprise budget and marketing plan with a focus on direct sales.



Saskatoon Berry



Currant Juice



Elderberries



Black, White, and Red Currants

Results and Discussion:

Our project was to determine where small fruits fit in each of our farm plans and what the potential was for non-traditional berries for our existing CSA, farmer's market, and restaurant outlets. Field days and focus sessions allowed us to expose consumers to fruit that they had possibly never tried before in an array of products from jam to juice to salad dressing and dried fruit baked into desserts. Participants were also encouraged to try fresh samples of elderberry, currants, saskatoon, and honeyberry as produce was available.

- Although initially consumers were willing to pay prices in the \$5 per pint range, the value of the product increased significantly with education about nutritional value and ways to use these less common berries.
- Educated consumers were willing to pay on average \$7 per pint of berries.
- Social and other media also played an important role in raising awareness. The project was featured in five regional and local publications and on an episode of "Around the Farm Table" video series.

All three farmer-researchers have included expanded plantings of elderberry, currants, and saskatoon in their farm enterprises after calculating labor and establishment costs and considering long range goals for perennial agriculture. We were easily able to leverage awareness of these three fruits by integrating them into our existing marketing and markets. Direct markets in the areas of each of the farmer-researchers are not yet saturated for either fresh fruit or minimally processed fruit products. All three farmer-researchers found honeyberry to require further research before we would expand plantings of this fruit, largely due to the high cost of plants, low establishment rates, and difficulty of finding planting stock. Final data and conclusions from this research project will be available in the late spring of 2014 on the Northcentral SARE website or by contacting the authors.

Methods:

Our goals for this project were to determine pricing and direct market options that would fit into our existing farm strategies. This two-year market research and development project involved eight field days spread among the three farms in the project, six focused tastings and discussions, and a survey taken by 60 individuals. 2012-2014 field days attracted 193 people, and focused group discussions involved 143 participants.



Field Day at Hilltop Farm



This project was developed with support from the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture — National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA). Any opinions, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed within do not necessarily reflect the view of the SARE program or the U.S. Department of Agriculture. USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Conclusions:

Expanding perennial berry plantings can provide pollinator food sources, soil protection, structural diversity on farms, market resilience, and additional crops that can withstand extreme weather events. Consumers educated about non-traditional berry varieties are willing to pay prices that make these plants a viable way to add diversity to existing orchards and market gardens. Partnering with chefs and local businesses that focus on value-added products can help increase eater familiarity with unusual fruits. Existing markets for other fruits can provide an important leverage point for the introduction of nontraditional berries. Final results from this SARE project, including the fruit profitability calculator tool, will be available in late spring, 2014.

Please contact us for more information! (1) Clare Hintz: elsewherefarmherbster@gmail.com (2) Erin Schneider: e.schneider.hilltopfarm@gmail.com (3) Rachel Henderson: henderson.r@gmail.com