

Marketing of Specialty Forest Products in the Southeast: Opportunities for Research, Education and Outreach¹

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The specialty forest products sector in the Southeast is growing rapidly - perhaps faster than in other sections of the country. In 1993, the state of Virginia exported almost 10 percent of the national total of wild harvested ginseng. On a yearly basis, the value of the specialty forest products extracted from Virginia's forests has been estimated at \$35 million. The Southeast has a long history of producing several important commodities including naval stores, pine straw, Spanish moss, and Saw Palmetto. New products and markets have proliferated putting further pressure on our natural resources. We need to explore opportunities for the sustainable management of natural resources, as well as developing new production systems.

To develop workable strategies for increasing production and marketing of specialty forest products, we have begun to analyze marketing systems for these products in Southwest Virginia. Describing marketing chains, interpreting data on important marketing elements, and comparing results within and between different groups of products will help us develop ways to collect and

use information throughout the region. Product categories selected as emphases for this study are NTFP crafts (grapevine wreaths, baskets, furniture, and birdhouses), medicinal and herbal NTFPs, specialty wood products (musical instruments), and edible forest products. All these products lend themselves to further exploring the productive systems highlighted in this conference.

The next step is to develop appropriate venues for educating landowners, collectors, and policy makers about the productive possibilities for specialty forest products. We have conducted focus group meetings to identify production and conservation concerns, and plan to conduct similar meetings throughout the region to ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are represented. Four specialty forest products factsheets that document production possibilities and conservation concerns are being tested to see if they are effective education and extension tools. Within the next year a regional conference will focus on the utilization and marketing of these products.

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