

## Beach Plum Consortium

### Performance Targets

1. Organize a consortium of growers, processors, chefs and specialty outlets with the intent of building a sustainable regional market for high value beach plum products.
2. Using our existing network of 15 early innovator/growers plus new growers recruited at field day tours, increase the production acreage of beach plum 5 fold.
3. Develop selection criteria based on processing and product quality characteristics identified by consumer focus groups, gourmet chefs, and specialty merchandisers. Use this ideotype to select and propagate superior lines from our range wide provenance garden for distribution.
4. Select and propagate brown rot resistant individuals from our provenance garden and establish common garden trials in each of 3 states on the East Coast.
5. Developing a native fruit crop with strong, positive consumer identity *and* integrating stakeholders into a self-directed consortium enables farmers to diversity and benefit from marketing value added products to a quality conscious niche market.

### Project Narrative

Sale of condiments made from wild-collected beach plum (*Prunus maritima*) is a thriving cottage industry with roots in colonial New England. The current coincidence of consumer demand for beach plum outstripping supply, depressed cranberry prices prompting growers to consider alternative crops, and our knowledge of beach plum management acquired over the past 6 years, yields an unparalleled opportunity to launch a small but regionally important industry. This project has 3 components: a marketing consortium, plant improvement, and product quality control. Early development of the Beach Plum Consortium will help maintain a profitable balance between supply and demand and strengthen the *de facto* competitive advantage enjoyed by the northeastern region. We will provide the basic expertise for market research and business planning through field days, workshops for producers, processors and upscale chefs, the beach plum web page and our Beach Plum Advisory Board. Plant improvement will be accomplished using our extensive provenance collection to make clonal selections with superior resistance to brown rot, thereby enhancing the sustainability of an intrinsically “low input” crop. Product quality control is an additional driver of the plant improvement effort in that consumer focus groups we have conducted clearly indicate a strong preference for distinctly robust “wild type” jams over blander recipes resembling mass-market products. Instead of emphasizing yield and automated harvesting in our selection program, we will follow the model used by the wine grape industry where distinctive fruit traits are emphasized. We will correlate fruit characteristics and post harvest performance with consumer preferences for the end products and make selections to retain these characteristics. Local differences among orchards, microsites and processors also will be identified to highlight the distinctive qualities of beach plum products.