

**Project Title: Beach Plum, A New Crop for New Markets**

Project LNE03-194

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## Summary

The present project has 3 components: catalyzing a marketing consortium composed of industry leaders of different sectors, broadening the consumer base for beach plum products, and establishing a niche identity for beach plum that distinguishes it from commonplace commodity fruits. Development of a Beach Plum Consortium early in the product life cycle will help maintain a profitable balance between supply and demand and strengthen the de facto competitive advantage enjoyed by the northeastern region. We provided the basic expertise for market development, marketing research and business planning through one-on-one visits, field days, workshops for producers, processors and the culinary community, the beach plum web page, and our Beach Plum Consortium Council. The consumer focus groups we conducted in 2002 clearly indicate a strong preference for distinctly robust “wild type” jams over blander recipes resembling mass-market products. Instead of emphasizing yield and mass marketing, we follow the model used by the wine grape industry where distinctive traits and regional identity are retained and emphasized. This approach links horticultural and marketing strategies in a way that will create a sustainable specialty fruit industry.

## Performance targets

Target 1. Establish a self-directed Consortium consisting of 30 farmers, 5 nurserymen, 10 processors and 15 chefs to produce, process and market beach plum products. Linking all sectors of the industry in a single organization will ensure a sustainable industry for high value beach plum products synchronized with demand in the Northeast Region.

Target 2. The Consortium will expand markets throughout the 9-state Northeast Region by consumer education and demonstrations at 5 culinary and food processing trade shows and 2 harvest festivals. By 2005 consortium growers will produce 5000 lbs. of fruit, enabling consortium processors to make and sell 15,000 additional jars of preserves to supplement existing markets and seed new markets developed through the outreach effort.

## Milestones

Consortium Development—In 2004, two meetings were held and attended by growers and processors. The first meeting, “Beach Plum Production and Marketing Meeting” was held on January 20, 2004, at the Dartmouth Grange, in Dartmouth, Massachusetts. Bob Weybright, Extension Support Specialist at Cornell University, spoke on the outcome of last fall’s Chef Marketing Interviews. Richard Uva of Cornell University presented his observations of growth and development observed on several beach plum orchards in 2003. Several growers participated in a Panel Discussion, “Production Year in Review,” moderated by Jeff LaFleur, Cape Cod Cranberry Growers’ Association. Five beach plum growers from Cape Cod and Long Island discussed successes as well as challenges from 2003 and their plans for the upcoming growing season. Keith Vanderhye and Ken Mudge, Cornell University, discussed the preliminary results of their beach plum propagation research. Tom Whitlow, Cornell University, moderated a coalition building session and developed a concept map describing the discussion section was produced. Photos, summaries of the presentations as well as the concept map can be seen on the beach plum website: <http://www.beachplum.cornell.edu/2004meeting/index.html>.

A second meeting entitled, “Organizational Structure,” was held on March 31, 2004 in Dartmouth, Massachusetts. The feature was a panel discussion addressing topics on organizational structure. Funding opportunities and by-laws for organization formation were also discussed. The speakers included: Russell Powell, Executive Director of the New England Apple Association; Richard J. Burke, Program Support Division of USDA Rural Development; and Richard Chandler, Director of the Ag. Business Training Program, Mass. Dept. of Ag. Resources. Additionally, Bonita Oehlke of the Massachusetts Department of Ag. Resources spoke on the Federal-State Market Improvement Program (FSMIP) grant program as a potential funding source for a beach plum industry organization. Tom Whitlow of Cornell University led a session on coalition building where participants discussed organization by-laws.

Expanding Markets—Correspondence continued with gourmet chefs in the New York City area. An update on beach plum culture with a copy of the recent article published in *Arnoldia*, a Journal published by Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts, was distributed. We had hoped to facilitate sales between growers and chefs this year. However, many grower's plants were still too small to produce significant quantities of fruit to sell. Other growers chose use their fruit in-house for value added products, which they intended to retail in existing venues.

We are working with a chef in New York's Hudson Valley who is planning to hold a beach plum dinner this winter, where each course will contain beach plum in each recipe. The event will be advertised to gourmet consumers and booked in advance.

On October 12, 2004, a jam sampling and brochure display was presented at: "Living with Nature: Healthy Eating for you and the Planet," A Celebration of Food and Biodiversity at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY. A beach plum jam recipe will be featured in the program.

We are in the process of preparing to have exhibits at two food industry trade shows in 2005. The International Restaurant and Food Service Show of New York, February 9-11, 2005 and the New England Food Service and Lodging Show, April 10-12, 2005. Jam made by Brieremere Farms of Long Island and dried fruit made by John Roberts and David Kidd, Dept. of Food Science, NYS Ag. Experiment Station will be displayed and sampled at the trade shows.

## **Outcomes**

Consortium Development—At our beach plum meeting in South Dartmouth, MA in earlier 2004, growers discussed organization formation. Preliminary by-laws were proposed by Jeff LaFleur of the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association and William Clark of Cape Cod Cooperative Extension. A steering committee was formed. Simon Athern of Morning Glory Farm, agreed to chair the committee. This is a big step in formation of a grower consortium. The steering committee consists of two beach plum growers, two beach plum processors, two Cooperative Extension staff, one industry professional, and one university researcher.

During a steering committee conference call held in July, several questions arose: Is there enough interest to form an organization? If so, what is its main purpose? What form would it take? Who will participate? Who will take leadership? The committee decided to survey the project participants to determine how to proceed. In September, a survey was sent by U.S. mail to 114 participants and posted on the website as well. The survey will serve as a vehicle to transfer project leadership to the steering committee at the end of the SARE grant. The results of the survey will be presented in the projects final report in 2005.

Expanding Markets—This year growers and processors reported that our project has resulted in increased demand for beach plum fruit and products. A farm on Long Island reported an average of 12 requests for beach plum products per weekend from New York City tourists. To meet increased demand, the farm as added an additional acre of beach plum this spring, in addition to renovating their existing planting.

Two growers have already made innovative plans to market their fruit in 2005. One has planned to sell directly to a chef in the Washington D.C. area. Another has been investigating the possibility of selling to a specialty product processor in the mid-west region and also plans to market directly to chefs in that region as well. A new grower in New Jersey reported that they are diversifying to beach plum to use in a wine product.

It has been harder to consolidate a grower consortium then expected. While we have established a steering committee we had hoped that the Beach Plum Consortium would have a presence at harvest festivals and trade shows in the summer of 2004 but was not ready to do so. We plan to help the group develop a display and organize these activities for 2005.

In 2004, we continued to maintain and expand the project's web site ([www.beachplum.cornell.edu](http://www.beachplum.cornell.edu)). It contains our reports, media articles, a photo gallery, meeting announcements, and a grower's guide. It receives approximately 400 hits per month.

Publicity--

Beach Plum: A new crop for new markets. (Project flier distributed in 2004).

Layton, Greg. 2004. Wild Fruit Provide a Tart Treat. *Milford Chronicle*. August 12, pp. 1. Milford, DE.

Project Publications--

Uva, R.H. Taming the Wild Beach Plum. *Arnoldia*, v 62, no4, pp 11-19.

Uva, R.H. and T.H. Whitlow. 2004. Beach plum production and marketing. *New York Berry News*, vol. 3 no. 10, October 19. Cornell University.

Whitlow, T.H. and R.H. Uva. 2004. A New Crop for New Markets, *American Fruit Grower*, April pp 24.

Web site--

Cornell University 2003. Beach Plum: Small farm sustainability through crop diversification and value-added products. <http://www.beachplum.cornell.edu/>

Presentations/meetings/displays--

Beach Plum Production and Marketing Meeting, Dartmouth Grange, Dartmouth, Massachusetts. January 20, 2004

Organizational Structure Meeting, Dartmouth Grange, Dartmouth, Massachusetts. March 31, 2004

Beach Plum New Crop Development, Berry Production Class, Cornell University. April 13, 2004.

Jelly Sampling and Brochure Display at "Living with Nature: Healthy Eating for you and the Planet," A Celebration of Food and Biodiversity at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, NY. October 12, 2004 (A beach plum jam recipe was featured in the program).

Beach Plum a New Small Fruit, Small Fruit Production Class, Cornell University. Nov. 24, 2004

Enclosures:

concept map

photographs

flier

*Arnoldia* article

Newspaper article