

## **2003 Annual Report: 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 will provide the basic expertise for market research and business planning through field days, workshops for producers, processors and the culinary community, the beach plum web page and our Beach Plum Consortium Council. 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 mass marketing, we will 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

The first Beach Plum Consortium meeting was held at Coonamessett Farm, East Falmouth, Mass. on May 8, 2003. 20 people participated, including farmers, processors, and extension staff from Mass. and N.Y. The results of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis conducted at an earlier meeting in March 2003 were discussed and the participants brain-stormed to develop a vision and mission statement. An action plan for the summer was developed.

A list serve was established through Cornell University to allow the group to continue their dialogue and progress toward target 1. To date, we have 117 members on the list serve which is composed of farmers, processors, researchers, and others interested in beach plum.

### Outreach and Consumer Education

We have continued to maintain and expand our 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. In February 2004 this site will be expanded to develop the Beach Plum Consortium (target 1). The main focus of the expansion will be to provide a linkage of beach plum to processors, chefs and other consumers.

In our attempt to expand markets (target 2) in early May 2003, 5225 plants were distributed to participants. Of these, 2315 plants went to 22 farms in the Northeast U.S. and 1 in Kansas. The remainder of the plants went to conservation plantings, home-based production, and to research institutions with programs aimed at germplasm selection. As the result of our efforts 38 farms have diversified to include beach plum fruit production.

Several farms that received plants were visited in the summer of 2003 and a production bulletin critiquing their efforts was distributed through our beach plum list serve. These new beach plum growers will share their experiences with others at our Production and Marketing Meeting on January 20, 2004 in a panel discussion.

#### Market Research and Development

In September of 2003 we conducted a series of interviews with five gourmet chefs in New York City and one in New York's Hudson Valley. Restaurants seated from 50 to 120 customers per night, entrees were priced \$30 and up and chefs favored using locally produced food. Originally, we planned to survey more chefs at a walk-by convention booth. Instead, our team visited each of the six restaurants and conducted in-depth interviews and provided our products to chefs and their staff. Although we surveyed less chefs than originally planned, we feel that the quality of the interaction and insight gained was much higher than would have been obtained through a survey.

Chefs were questioned: in what form would you like to receive beach plum products; what uses would it have; what amount would you purchase, what are your price points, and how would you like to buy the products? Each chef was given 5 pounds of beach plum fruit to experiment with and invited to share their experiences with us. The chefs were excited about beach plum in general. One chef requested to purchase additional fruit from us and has already added a beach plum sauce to his restaurant menu for the holiday season. Another chef plans to put on a beach plum dinner in late winter of this year. Each course will contain recipes containing some beach plum. The event will be advertised and booked in advance. Chefs expressed interest in high quality fresh as well as frozen fruit. Both pastry chefs we spoke with were concerned about pitting the fruit. We plan to produce samples of pitted and pureed fruit next season for this market. Next year growers in our consortium will be able to sell directly to the gourmet chef market as a result of this effort.

We are in the process of preparing to have exhibits at 3 food industry trade shows in 2004. We had hoped that the Beach Plum Consortium would have a presence at harvest festivals and trade shows in the summer of 2003 but was unable to do so. We will be planning to help the group develop a display and organize these activities for 2004.

## Outcomes—

We helped to facilitate several articles that were written about our program in local and national media. They are listed below followed by outreach articles written by us in 2003 concerning the beach plum project.

### Publicity

Karp, D., 2003. Beach Plums: hard to tame but growers don't give up, New York Times, New York, Sept 3, pp. 8.

McGuiggan, A.W. 2003. Searching for the elusive beach plum and finding it. The Hingham Journal.

Wallack, J., 2003. A plum job: Carver cranberry grower aids the search for a feasible way to grow the fruit, The Patriot Ledger, Quincy, Mass. October 8.

SARE/USDA, 2003. SARE 2003: Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program, USDA, pp. 9.

SARE/USDA, 2003. Heritage plant holds promise for northeast growers, Country Folks Grower, pp. 19.

### Project Publications

Uva, R.H. 2003. Growth and yield of beach plum (*Prunus maritima* Marshall) in horticultural, land restoration, and ecological systems. Dissertation, Cornell University, Ithaca.

Uva, R.H. and T.H. Whitlow. 2003. Beach plum: a shrub for low input landscapes. Landscape Plant News. 14: 6-9.

Uva, R. and T. Whitlow. 2003. Beach Plum (*Prunus maritima* Marsh.): small farm sustainability through crop diversification and value added products. HortScience. 38: 793.

Uva, R. and T. Whitlow. 2003. Beach plum on Long Island. Long Island Gardening Quarterly, Autumn: 8-9.

Uva, R.H. and T.H. Whitlow. Beach plum. In: The Encyclopedia of Fruits and Nuts, J. Janick ed., CABI publishing (in press).

### Web site

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