Beach Plum Project receives renewed funding

Formation of consortium shifts focus to market development, industry growth

[April 21, 2003]

The Beach Plum Project based at Cornell University has received additional funding for two years from the USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program. "We’ve refined our project focus," says project coordinator Rick Uva. "For the next two years, we’re concentrating on working with beach plum growers, processors, and marketers to facilitate market development and industry growth in the Northeast region."

Uva and principal investigator Thomas Whitlow met in March with the industry representatives who make up the project’s advisory board to consider the future of the project and the industry. The group decided to form the Beach Plum Consortium, which will hold its first official meeting May 8. At that meeting, the Consortium will develop a mission vision and goals, set priorities, consider horticultural research needs, and discuss future funding sources.

At the March meeting, the group got the ball rolling by starting a “SWOT” analysis – discussing beach plum’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. See notes below to get a flavor for the discussion.

If you would like to attend the May 8 meeting, contact Uva by phone (607-255-2746) or email (rhu1@cornell.edu).

Notes from the Beach Plum Advisory Board Meeting
March 20, 2003

Consortium Goals:

Control own destiny
Ensure quality & authenticity
Protect market share

Potential Consortium Actions:

1. What is the definition of "Beach Plum" - avoid adulteration
   - DNA Fingerprints to identify regional differences
   - Define the product and the process
2. Certification
   - Regional I.D. - Cape Cod, East End Long Island, Cape May
   - Organic
   - Quality control
   - Grade A certification
3. Consumer Education
   - Bridge generation gap
   - Reach out to new groups
4. Marketing
5. Engage state and federal regulators for labeling issues and regulatory advise
6. Develop commercial kitchen - only 1 available in Massachusetts
7. Help develop pitting & IQF (individual quick frozen) products to supply chefs
8. Develop science-based claims
   - Brix, pH
   - Health benefits, antioxidant content
9. Help solve grower problems
   - Cultural/production problems
   - New varieties - Early, etc.
   - Marketing

Other Possible Consortium Members:
1. Chefs
2. Grower data base
3. Processors
4. Mass. Specialty food - Dept. of Ag. (Elke)

Next meeting:
May 8, 03 10:00 am, Coonamessett Farm
Agenda
   Consortium mission vision goals
   Priorities/actions
       How to accomplish them
   Horticultural research needs
   New sources of funding
SWOT Analysis for the Beach Plum Industry

Strengths
Mystique
Limited production
High storability - freezable, dryable
High anti-oxidant content
Unique
Tartness - little goes along way
Crop protection approved for production

Weaknesses
Alternate year bearing - fluctuating availability
Production practices
No reliable vegetative propagation methods
Pest problems
Labor intensive to harvest and to sort for processors
No established quality standards
Consumer ignorance on the taste of beach plum

Opportunities
Fruits can be preserves (frozen)
Consumer education
Maintain list of consumers
Vintage years-use to promote bumper crop
Other products: wine, vinegar, ice cream, sorbet
Certification standards vary with products, ie amount of beach plum fruit
Demand exists for supply
Organic production

Threats
Large scale production will lower the price
Adulteration
Dilution
Market confusion (product identification)