

Trees & More

Short Term Income Possibilities

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Forest owners can now enjoy annual income from their woodlands and still manage for high quality sawlogs and veneer logs. No, there hasn't been any new super growth hormones developed! However, foresters have begun to focus on non-traditional items that nature produces in and around forests every year..potential products that can be marketed for annual income. A list of these potential products would number in the thousands, giving every owner a unique opportunity to select something that fits their specific resource and management situation. Even small acreage is capable of producing these products. Recreational properties of only a few acres can be just as productive for these products as a tract of several hundred acres. If you own forest land and would like to explore ways to generate short-term income from it, the next few paragraphs should prove interesting. Likewise, non landowners may find opportunities for value-added businesses.

This whole group of products is known by several names: Special Forest Products, Alternative Forest Products, or Non-timber Forest Products. No matter what you call them, the diversity of Missouri's forests becomes evident as we identify some of the products. While many of us have been aware of many of these products for a long time, there are probably surprises for everyone. Modern society has lost its familiarity with many of the ancient remedies, edibles, and materials produced in our forests. However, the current popularity of naturopathic medicines and health food supplements is renewing interest in compounds derived from plants, many of which grow in forests. Wild edibles are also of interest to many who find organically grown foods desirable. Suddenly we have discovered that what we thought were only small localized markets are actually global. Forest landowners who are willing to seek them out have access to all the levels of markets. As we take a closer look at some of these products, you might want to ask yourself what similar products you might be able to generate. In a sense this article is meant to stimulate your thinking about new ways to make forest land more productive.

CONES & SEEDS

Cones from coniferous species offer a variety of market possibilities. Since the cone contains seed, one of

the most obvious markets for ripe cones is for seed to supply tree nurseries throughout the country. Cone harvest is sometimes done in conjunction with a timber sale timed to occur when the cones are ripe. Cones can then be more easily picked from the tops remaining following the removal of logs and pulpwood. There are companies who specialize in this business pay landowners for the rights to harvest cones. Of course, a landowner could also harvest and sell cones to a seed broker or dealer. Sometimes, for specific purposes, trees are climbed to pick cones but this is best left to the professional.

Cones which have opened are also in demand for various floral, wreath, and potpourri products. Following seed extraction, many nurseries now sell opened cones to craft markets. Almost any species of cones, from very small fir cones to large ponderosa pine cones are marketable. Cones are most often sold on weight basis, but may also be sold by volume (e.g. Bushel) or may be individually priced for very large or unusual specimens. Prices average \$.30-\$.60 per pound or the equivalent.

Hardwood seed crops can be handled in a similar manner. There is a growing market for seed of both tree and shrub species for native plant nurseries. These nurseries are experiencing increasing demand for native plants to be used in landscaping, windbreaks, shelter belts, and other horticultural uses. Seed from understory plants and shrubs are equally desirable and seed from medicinal plant species may be marketed as those species are grown in a cultured environment. A thorough inventory of all your forest plants would be a good idea to determine if you have potential for harvesting multiple seed crops.

Prices vary according to relative abundance of the species and the difficulty of harvesting the seed. Price lists are available from larger seed dealers and seed supply wholesalers. Landowners can harvest seed themselves or sell harvesting rights to a seed collection company. At this point, seed certification programs do not generally exist for most species but timing of harvest and care of seed following harvest are important to assure quality and maximum viability. Seed production is variable, even in local areas. For consistent income it is suggested that landowners focus on several different

species and become familiar with seed production requirements for each. You should also check for special state regulations regarding the species being harvested, although there are few restrictions for harvesting on private land. For example, in many states there are special regulations for harvesting ginseng involving documentation of amounts harvested. The best initial contact might be your state forest nurseryman or a seed collection company for information specific to your state.

DECORATIVE WOOD & HORTICULTURAL PRODUCTS

Unusual parts of trees such as burls, conks, shelf fungus and dwarf mistletoe infected branches are desirable for many purposes and can be sold in most areas of the country. Distorted grain patterns, colors, textures are appealing for wood turnings, veneer, carvings, or artistic sculpture. Diamond willow walking sticks from willow infected with canker is very popular. In Missouri, oak, hickory, willow, redcedar, walnut, sassafras and staghorn sumac are harvested when 1"-1.5" in diameter for walking sticks. Some have faces carved on the top, others are debarked, while many are simply cut and dried before marketing. Wholesale prices average \$1.00-\$2.00 per 3-4 foot stick. Markets for walking sticks are far from saturated.

Cypress knees, fruitwood grafts, pine knots, knot holes, and limb crotches are a few more products worth mentioning. All can be marketed through hardwood lumber outlets, carving shops and speciality wood supply houses. A few specialty wood supply catalogs also list a variety of these types of products. Horticultural supply companies occasionally stock this type of material for specialty bouquets, floral arrangements, bases, etc. Don't overlook branches and twigs as products. Unusual bark, color, texture, buds, or shape are desirable for horticultural product markets. Thick (2-4") cottonwood bark is prized by wood carvers because of its color, texture and unique presentation options.

Oak, hickory, and elm (with bark still attached) sticks in a diameter range of 1/2" to 1 1/2" are purchased for manufacture of bent-wood or rustic furniture. Fresh 4 foot sticks sell for approximately \$.50 each. Longer sticks, up to 10 foot long sell for more. Eastern redcedar is also used for similar products. Sticks can be shipped to manufacturers via UPS in bundles of slightly less than 100 pounds. The shipping cost is approximately \$60.00 per bundle.

Burls, figured wood, spalted wood, or woods of unusual color are also in demand for turnings, wood pens, furniture panels, veneer, and many other specialty uses. These are items that are relatively scarce and highly desirable, therefore it is not uncommon for them to be sold individually. Spalted wood usually develops in logs or trees that have been lying on the ground for some time and the decay process is just beginning. Spalting usually occurs in the sapwood portion of the tree and the

heartwood may still be usable for lumber or other solid wood products. Hint: Old log decks sometimes are a good source of this material. Decorative woods are generally sold by weight. The price per pound is highly variable and depends on the species, rarity, and quality of the item. It is not uncommon for items in this category to change hands many times before being processed into a consumer product. Global markets are very active. The Internet is very helpful in locating dealers and individual markets.

MEDICINALS & PHARMACEUTICALS

Medicinal compounds used for naturopathic remedies include a large number of herbs used to make teas and oils that are alleged to have curative or therapeutic effects on common ailments. Actual medicinal properties are sometimes speculative, however these markets are well established and growing. There are, however, plants and trees containing specific chemical compounds used by manufacturers of pharmaceutical drugs. Wildcrafting or gathering these plants have historically provided income for many rural families. While cultivation techniques for these species will eventually assure uniformity and sustainability of harvest levels, current demands exceed supply. agroforestry techniques currently being developed offer much opportunity in this area.

Of course, pharmaceuticals are not the only use for many of these plants. Dyes, cosmetics, fungicides, and insecticides are additional products in this category derived from relatively common plants. Several botanical companies with headquarters in Missouri purchase and market botanical plant material throughout the world. All regularly publish price lists and specifications for the plants or plant parts they purchase.

There is much publicity about the value of a few plant species that are in high demand. Some of these plants are relatively rare and may actually be listed as rare or endangered. Landowners are advised to become familiar with harvesting regulations that might be applicable if these plants are marketed. As mentioned previously, sustainability of wild populations of these plants should be a primary concern.

BARK

Bark is another item in demand for medicinal and "natural" food supplements. We recently were contacted by a company in Idaho interested in purchasing 10 tons of slippery elm bark. In this case bark is stripped from small saplings, obviously killing the trees. Sustainability is a definite problem in this case. However, landowners with slippery elm trees large enough to produce seed might consider using some of the seed to plant small plantations grown exclusively for bark production. In this case, the bark of saplings might be more valuable than logs of a mature elm tree and have a much shorter rotation.

Cottonwood bark is prized by wood carvers, who carve faces and caricatures from the thick plates. It is also used for bases for floral arrangements and crafts. It is softer than the wood, but dense enough to maintain detail. Pieces 3-4 inches wide, 10-12 inches long and 2-3 inches thick would sell for \$5-\$15.00 at craft and carving shows. White and paper birch and aspen bark is also in demand for crafts, boxes, containers, and decorative uses in areas of the country where it occurs naturally. Bark with distinctive patterns (eg. Hackberry, winged elm, persimmon, etc.) or color may have a market in your area. On the negative side, sustainability can be a significant consideration for many bark products.

RECREATIONAL ENTERPRISES

Use of private forest land for recreational pursuits offer private landowners excellent potential for annual income. The landowner has almost unlimited options in this area, from doing almost nothing to very intensive development. The old real estate adage of "Location, Location, Location," certainly is true here. If your land is located near population centers, your options are probably greater than if it is in a very remote area. However, remoteness is a commodity that can be marketed also. Fee hunting and fishing have been sources of income in many areas of the country for many years. Urban families are now willing to pay for nature photography, harvesting wild edibles, farm vacations, hiking, photographic tours, picnic areas, and bird watching to name only a few.

Allowing public access to your private property is not without risk. Liability insurance rates vary widely for recreational enterprises. Insurance is a consideration that must be thoroughly investigated prior to any business start up.

Summary

In this short article, only a few of the thousands of the potential forest products could be named. For the innovative landowner or entrepreneur, however, these brief descriptions will point the way to specific products and markets. To begin research, it is suggested you obtain a copy of Income Opportunities in Special Forest Products, Self Help Suggestions for Rural Entrepreneurs; USDA-Forest Service; Agricultural Information Bulletin No. 666, 1993. The initial printing has been sold out, but most libraries can obtain microfiche copies. Individual chapter may be downloaded from a web site at the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison, WI. www.fpl.fs.fed.us/documnts/usda/agib666/.htm

You might also want to visit a web site specifically for Special Forest Product information. It is maintained by Virginia Tech and is regularly updated with information relative to the Midwest as well as other parts of the country. www.sfp.forprod.vt.edu

This manuscript was originally prepared for a Missouri Conservationist article published in 1999. It is included in this packet as a general overview of the diversity of "special forest products."

* Shelby Jones retired from the Missouri Dept. Of Conservation after a career of 32 years with Forestry Division. Much of his career was spent in the field of wood products utilization & marketing. In the past few years, Shelby has focused on non-traditional products of our woodlands and how these products can generate annual or short-term incomes for private forest landowners. His work and ideas have been presented to audiences throughout the Midwest. He is available for personal assistance or advice to businesses or landowners throughout the Midwest.