Rural Idahoans Learn of Opportunities from "Special Forest Products"

The Situation
Markets are expanding for edible mushrooms, floral greens, medicinal products, and similar materials collectively referred to as "special forest products". In 1989, nearly $50 million was returned to harvesters in Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia for beargrass, evergreen boughs, and other floral and Christmas greens. In 1993, nearly $20 million was returned to harvesters in Oregon, Washington, and Idaho for wild edible mushrooms.

Many residents of natural resource-based communities in Idaho are looking for ways to diversify their local economies, but are often unaware of the opportunities in these markets, or how to pursue them.

Our Response
As part of the Idaho Forest Stewardship program, a cooperative effort with the Idaho Dept. of Lands and many other partners, the UI Cooperative Extension System conducted a workshop titled Special Forest Products for non-industrial private forest (NIPF) owners and those interested in supplemental income. The program was held in Moscow in December, 1994, and Kellogg in February, 1995. The session featured a presentation on vital questions harvesters must answer before collecting and how special forest products can be integrated into forest management. A panel discussion followed, with representatives of firms that purchase or process special forest products.

Achievements
Forty-six (46) people attended the two sessions. An estimated total of 38 NIPF owners and over 6,851 NIPF acres were reached with the program. Eighty-nine percent of the participants indicated they would implement improved management practices as a result of attending.

Over 150 people have participated in Special Forest Products at 6 locations in Idaho since 1993. It is also commonly attended by natural resource professionals from both public and industrial ownerships who are interested in better managing both special forest products and people who are harvesting them.
The Future

Special Forest Products was part of a comprehensive Extension education program for NIPF owners titled Strengthening Forest Stewardship Skills. The series of programs features a diverse array of educational activities designed to strengthen NIPF owners' ability to implement practices which improve forest health and growth. Programs are offered in a variety of locations and times and are announced in a yearly calendar distributed each fall. Other programs offered in this annual series cover tree planting, thinning, insect and disease treatments, and many other topics.

As markets develop and the need for economic diversification in Idaho's timber-based communities grows, additional sessions of this program will be held, to help Idahoans enter these markets and sustainably manage forests for these products. Efforts will also be made to attract buyers of these materials to Idaho, to create stronger links between them and Idaho harvesters and forest owners. A companion publication on special forest products is also available from the University of Idaho.

For More Information

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