

WEST VIRGINIA HERB GROWERS RESEARCH PROJECT

FNE02-440

INTERIM REPORT

PROJECT DIRECTOR:

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The problem we hope to address is that farmers in West Virginia have a difficult time selling their produce at a fair market price; this is particularly true for herb growers. Inexpensive imported herbs glut the market and are treated with fumigants and fungicides. There is no reliable domestic source for these herbs, let alone an organic source. We are a network of herb growers formed within the West Virginia Herb Association, to increase the marketability of herbs by investigating buyer's needs and growing herbs to meet those needs. The goal is to produce the best possible medicinal herbs, and by working with herbs no one is growing, ensure premium prices and assured markets.

The focus of the network is to grow plants that no one else is growing, plants not commonly grown in West Virginia or the United States, or those that suffer intense wildcrafting pressures till they are endangered. Our organic growing techniques will reduce environmental and health risks associated with conventional farming and improve water quality, the environment and preserve family farming, as well as make the end product highly marketable to the medicinal herb trade. Our aim is to give our growers the opportunity to sell their herbs directly to manufacturers, medicine makers or distributors from West Virginia and across the country rather than attempting retail sales. We intend to research the growth of medically important herbs whose growth requirements indicate they would be viable in West Virginia, including but not limited to:

- Gotu kola
- Siberian ginseng
- Goldenseal
- Hawthorne
- Vitex
- Milk thistle
- Nettles
- Astragalus
- Colonsonia
- Yerba Mansa
- Ginko Biloba
- Dong quai
- Ginger
- Marshmallow root
- Arnica
- Ashwaganda
- Schizandra

The challenges include the inherent variability of the herbs and influences of the soil, weather, and rainfall on the herbs once in the field. To cut down the variables during germination, a central germination facility is planned to start seed, break dormancy and get an early start on the growing season. Herbs will be seeded in plugs and transplanted in larger pots till hardened off and planted in the fields. The benefit of starting all seed in one facility will be careful monitoring and quality control of all variables that can cause project failure when plants are purchased from an outside supplier.



PROJECT CO-OPERATORS:

Scott and Cindy Snyder, Healing Hills Herb Farm

project director, greenhouse operators, construction,  
research, publisher

Elaine Ferry, Arcadia Farm

research, development, statistics, construction

Buddy and Pam Moore, Arrowhead Gardens

research, construction

David Hawkins, Mother Earth Foods

research, construction

Melissa Dennison, Garden Treasures

Beverly Winemiller

Sue Cosgrove, Lee Jun Farm

research

As of 12/15/02 the hoophouse is finished and will be in operation by mid-January. We ran into two problems with regards to hoophouse construction;

1. The solar fan is too small to sufficiently ventilate the hoophouse so supplemental fans will be used.
2. We did not take into consideration that the hoophouse did not come with ends. The lumber was purchased and construction done by Scott Snyder. We also did not consider windows and doors, fortunately we were able to salvage used windows and doors for the ends of the hoophouse.

One bright spot of hoophouse construction was that thru the generosity of a local greenhouse, a 150,000 Btu fuel oil heater was donated to the project. We were able to purchase a 275 gal. tank for the heater for \$50.00 saving us a considerable amount of money. The funds slated for the heater will be used to purchase the fuel oil needed to operate the new heater.

Three workshops were held in the spring of 2002 geared toward educating our growers. Basic propagation and growing techniques were taught as well as all pertinent information relating to the grant. The workshops were very well attended by not only the growers but other parties as well.

All the seed stock has been purchased as well as the straw for the mulching study. Soil tests are completed and the beds are prepared for the mulching study which will begin in the spring of 2003.