

The Wild Lingonberry (*Vaccinium Vitis-Idaea* L. Var. *Minus* Lodd) Industry in North America

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Abstract

The lingonberry, known in Canada as the partridgeberry, foxbeny, redberry and cranberry grows throughout the country. The lingonberry also grows extensively in Alaska, where it is known as the lowbush cranberry and is utilized locally. This fruit can also be found in the extreme north east region of the United States especially in Maine and New Hampshire where it is harvested primarily for home use. Vander Kloet's *The Genus Vaccinium in North America* (Research Branch, Agriculture Canada. 1988) describes in detail the range of this plant in North America.

Production trends

Despite this plant's wide distribution in Canada, only four areas exploit this crop to varying degrees. First, in La Ronge, Saskatchewan, First Nations peoples harvest about 500-2,500 kg of this fruit referred to as cranberry in mid-September. Pickers receive about \$4.50 (Cdn)/kg, and the product is marketed locally.

Second, Nova Scotia harvests the foxberry along the Eastern Shore and into Cape Breton Island. Although several studies researched the potential development of this fruit, the industry remains small and local.

Third, in the Goose Bay area of Labrador, residents harvest redberries, but for personal use only. In 1994, Newfoundland processors attempted unsuccessfully to acquire supplies of the fruit from Labrador to meet market demand but were unsuccessful because of the high price demanded by pickers (>\$4.50 [Cdn]/kg).

Fourth, partridgeberries are harvested commercially on the island of Newfoundland. Production varies, but a mean annual harvest of 96,500 kg. makes Newfoundland the largest North American producer of wild lingonberries. Processors paid an average price of \$1.69 (Cdn)/kg from 1986-1995 which translates into a crop value of \$243,000 (Cdn) for unprocessed fruit. Most of the fruit is exported frozen for secondary processing, although local processing is expanding with the development of new products in the form of jams, jellies, pie fillings, condiments and wine.

More recently, a "niche" market for fresh product packaged in "clamshell" containers has been developed for the Toronto, Ontario market, where the product is renamed the

41 mountain cranberry." Also, a number of processed products are marketed in areas across Canada where large numbers of Newfoundlanders have settled.

The harvest on the island of Newfoundland generally begins in mid-September. One problem encountered each year that has been especially troublesome during the past two years has been the premature harvesting of the fruit. This results in the waste of a valuable resource as much of the immature fruit, having been stored by pickers before the opening of the processing season, has to be rejected at the processing plant because of poor quality.

On a positive note, as interest in exploiting the virtues of the fruit began to grow, the Newfoundland government responded by developing a promotional campaign in late 1995 that included printing posters, recipe brochures and table tents that were made available to the hotel, restaurant, institutional and retail food trade. In applied research, attempts are underway to determine the potential of growing selected European cultivars. If successful, this would give producers another crop in their farming operations that would be well received by the public.

Concluding remarks

Clearly, the lingonberry will become a more important crop in Newfoundland as interest grows in the fruit's expanding fresh market, its medicinal properties, and its potential as a beverage.

References

Vander Kloet, S.P., 1988. The Genus *Vaccinium* in North America. Research Branch Agriculture Canada Publication 1828. 201 pp.