Minnesota lifestyles and livelihoods are enriched by the harvesting of natural resources— including gathering, hunting and trapping. Livelihood benefits accrue directly, though use and consumption of harvested products, and indirectly, through the exchange and sale of harvested products, in raw or processed forms. There is no reason to assume that sustainable harvesting and market-oriented harvesting are incompatible. However, sustainable market-oriented harvesting requires basic understanding of market considerations.

**ECONOMIC ISSUES**
Economic issues relate to potential setbacks or failures of commercial strategies relating to factors such as supply and demand or economies of scale, to name a couple. For example, a buyer may refuse to do business with you because you cannot provide sufficient product to justify a pickup. Likewise, you may find that you cannot foresee enough sales to justify the cost of permits and harvesting equipment.

**SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES**
Social and political issues relate to written and unwritten claims to particular resources and associated customs. A recreational mushroom gatherer in a public space, for example, might receive a much different reception from park officials or other gatherers should his or her gathering become commercial. Cultural and ethnic differences in resource harvest and use might also lead to misunderstanding and challenges. One of the most important social/political considerations (and misunderstandings) in Minnesota pertains to Native American gathering rights on ceded territories, around the state (see image next page) and treaty rights associated with these territories.

**MANAGEMENT COMPATIBILITY**
Finally, it is important to consider the compatibility of management of public and pri-
MARKETS

**Formal markets:** Markets governed by regulation in which participants report transactions, pay taxes and generally adhere to legal requirements.

**Informal markets:** Markets that are unregulated or that operate in spite of regulations.

**Market:** A market is one of a variety of systems, institutions, social relations, procedures and infrastructures through which goods and services are exchanged.

**Structure:** The physical arrangement of the market that results from interactions and relationships.

**Scale:** The volume of product bought or sold for a given period of time.

**Value-added:** Physical or other transformations to raw materials that increase their value.

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*Above: Ceded territories in Minnesota, Source: keepersofthewater.org.*

Private lands with commercial harvest and gathering. While resource management goals and gathering objectives may be mutually beneficial in some cases, incompatibility may undermine commercial harvest ventures. For example, habitat restoration areas with valuable products might be highly vulnerable to disturbances caused by harvest.

**Markets decoded**

We directly and indirectly encounter markets every day: the grocery store, a farmers market, online shopping or at the gas pump. What exactly is a market? Rather than as a place, think about a market as a variety of systems, institutions, relationships, procedures and infrastructures through which goods and services are exchanged.

Sometimes we just come across an opportunity to sell raw materials or value-added products. Someone notices that you make beautiful holiday greens arrangements and offers to buy 20 for a community event. You might do it, and that is that; or, you might think, “I should consider doing this to make some money every year.” In the latter case, it pays to do some basic market research.

**Market research - four basic questions**

There are lots of materials and guides available to help with business planning and market research. One goal of this publication is to keep it simple, to give you an easy way to start thinking about topics that might seem complicated at first. Market research essentially boils down to asking four questions.

1. **WHAT DO I SELL?**
   Is it a raw material (like berries)? A value-added product (like jam)? Think seriously about what your product is to the end-customer. Is it really just jam, or is it northern Minnesota in a jar? Is it forest stewardship through sustainable harvest? Is it a local job? Is it the Minnesota lifestyle? Knowing what you sell can help you decide how best to sell it and, therefore, create demand for your product.

2. **HOW DO I CONNECT TO THE MARKET?**
   It is important to understand market structure and how you connect to the final consumer. Do you sell directly? To an intermediary? Online? Knowing how you connect is important because it influences costs, market access and price. Selling to an intermediary may result in a lower price but likely takes far less time than making many individual sales. On the other hand, telling your or your product’s story may be far more difficult through an intermediary.

A related consideration is market formality. Laws and regulations govern formal markets, where transactions are reported in some manner. In contrast, social understandings and agreements typically govern informal markets, and transactions are less likely to be reported. Consider the degree of formali-
ty for your market, why it may be the way it is, and the potential social, economic and ecological implications of the way the market functions. For example, product buyers and other important intermediaries may not call specific attention to their existence if the market is informal.

3. HOW DO I FIT IT?
Likewise, you should understand how what you sell and how you connect fit within the larger market system. Market scope refers to the geographic extent – both for supply and demand - of the market: local, regional, national, international. Scale refers to the amount (or volume) that is sold in a given period of time. Time is another consideration. Is the market seasonal? Is it growing or shrinking over time? Does anyone else do what you do? To put it simply: Understand the big picture but operate at your specific level.

4. IS IT WORTH DOING?
In the end, you will need to determine if the activity is worth doing, whether for financial or other reasons. Making money is not the only reason to harvest wild products; for many harvesters, it’s not their main motivation.

There are many different ways to begin to answer the above questions:

TALK
Talk to harvesters, growers, brokers, buyers, vendors, store owners and employees, foresters, neighbors, friends and anyone else who has potentially useful information on how markets for your product(s) work and why.

USE
Use phone calls, personal visits, libraries, the Internet, the Chamber of Commerce, universities and local businesses. Buy similar products and make samples of your own to show potential buyers and others who can provide constructive feedback.

INVESTIGATE
Investigate competitors, challenges faced by others in the business, competing products (substitutes), prices (at all stages of the market chain), year-to-year trends, seasonality, value added options, production and quality standards, common and unexpected problems.

Concluding thoughts
Market-oriented or commercial harvesting is not for everyone. Many livelihood benefits

Scope: The geographic extent of the market, both in terms of obtaining supply and meeting demand.
MARKETS

REFERENCES


MARKETS

accrue to harvesters of wild goods without them ever entering the market. However, for some harvesters, markets represent an appealing option for generating income or even offsetting the expenses associated with their favorite gathering activities. Whenever you harvest natural resources, but especially when you do so commercially, it is important to understand the market and the potential that market demands might have to positively or negatively influence good harvesting practices.

Notes

What do I sell or want to sell?

How do I connect to the market?

How do I fit into the market system?

Is it worth doing?

Advantages: Disadvantages: