

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

Black chokeberries a niche for Iowa growers?

Black chokeberries may not be something many shoppers have on their grocery lists yet, but that could change if some southwest Iowa growers have their way.

A field day devoted to black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*) production was held in late August at Vaughn and Cindy Pittz's *Sawmill Hollow Farm* near Missouri Valley in Harrison County. More than 100 people from Iowa and five other states attended. *Sawmill Hollow* is the largest Aronia berry plantation in the Midwest and the first in the U.S. to be managed organically.

Commonly known as black chokeberry, Aronia is a deciduous shrub native to Iowa that is sometimes confused with chokecherry, an Iowa hardwood not nearly so attractive for fruit production. Aronia berries contain high levels of antioxidants, polyphenols, and anthocyanins—more than cranberries, blueberries, grapes, and most other fruits. Research has shown these compounds may help reduce the risk for cancer, heart disease and diabetes in humans. Though largely overlooked commercially in the U.S., Aronia berries are widely grown in Europe.



As a native plant, Aronia is well adapted to Iowa growing conditions and also to organic production. The plants are hardy, relatively free of insect and disease pressure, and a year ago, under very dry conditions, produced record yields at *Sawmill Hollow*.

Based on plant sales by *Sawmill Hollow*, it's estimated that within three or four years close to 50 Aronia plantations may exist in Iowa covering approximately 1,500 acres. A plant density of 700 plants per acre and average yields of 20 pounds per plant can produce 14,000 pounds of fruit per acre. At current prices of around \$1.00 per pound, Aronia could generate a gross income of \$14,000 per acre. That could translate to a \$21 million industry statewide, with organic production pushing the figure even higher.

“ISU Extension has been instrumental in helping *Sawmill Hollow Organic Farms* achieve our goal of creating a new sustainable industry for the region and also educating the public about the positive health qualities of Aronia berries.”
...Vaughn Pittz



For more information about this and other ISU Extension programs, contact Harrison County Extension Education Director, Clint McDonald at 712-644-2105, clint@iastate.edu, Extension commercial horticulture field specialist, Eldon Everhart, 712-755-3104, everhart@iastate.edu or Vaughn & Cindy Pittz at *Sawmill Hollow, Inc.*, P.O. Box 126, Missouri Valley, IA 51555, aronianation@iowatelecom.net, 712-648-2432.

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Sept. 2007