

Minnesota Elderberry Cooperative

Spring 2015 Report to Members and Potential Growers

Minnesota Elderberry Cooperative enters 2015 with a number of significant transitions in place for its development as a functioning growers' cooperative in both buying and selling elderberries and elderflowers. As a cooperative, we definitely remain in our formative years. MEC member participation and concept contributions made this year will impact MEC's character and scope of operations going forward. Below is a brief report and overview of the year ahead. If you are not a member yet, I invite you to become a Member today!

Come to the March 28, 2015 Members Meeting

All members should attend our first annual meeting on Saturday, March 28, 2015 beginning at 9 am at 23 Empire, St. Paul, MN. We will begin the morning with a business meeting with members voting on some important issues regarding MEC's purchase and processing of elderberries this coming harvest season. The agenda will include ample opportunity to ask questions, offer suggestions and openly discuss our interests and objectives as members. Please see the accompanying membership application. Please fill it out and send it to me today to aid our planning. You may also bring it with you when you come to the meeting.

Those wishing to volunteer for MEC, or to observe and learn more about MEC and its upcoming events, are also welcome to attend beginning at 10 am. We have much to report as far as potential developments in the upper Midwest elderberry small fruit industry as well as some ambitious goals for this year in education and outreach. We need your help with time, ideas and in the agricultural-commercial progress of your own elderberry crops.

I have had a number of people express the desire to volunteer labor in growing and harvesting elderberries. We need to establish a way to provide and manage structured, helpful and educational opportunities for such persons/groups.

Shared Equipment Progress

During its fall meetings, MEC's Steering Committee approved the concept of acquiring equipment necessary for the installation, cultivation, harvesting and processing of elderberries. MEC will make this equipment available to grower members through a process we need to establish together including reservation, pick-up-return, equipment storage & maintenance, and a small fee schedule per use to help cover operations costs.

MEC has been awarded a **Value Added Grant by the Minnesota Dept. of Agriculture** of 25% (\$3,418.75) towards the purchase (\$13,675) and installation of mobile elderberry processing equipment consisting of one of Terry's Destemmers, associated tools/equipment and a stainless washing-sanitation system that will meet state and federal requirements to safely process elderberries for resale in the wholesale market – 25 lb. frozen berries in 4 gallon, food grade buckets.

On behalf of MEC, I plan to apply for grants to help towards the balance of the purchase as well as some funds towards field training with the equipment. If you know of a suitable grant opportunity for MEC, please let one of the Steering Committee members know about it.

Paul Otten located and reserved a used Eco (Regi) weeder for MEC to purchase for \$2000. We will need to raise the funds for this purchase as well as for other potential equipment to share among our grower members.

MEC has \$482.69 in its bank account.

Upcoming Events

Please visit the MEC website and look around at the additional information added over the last few months. Note that the **Events** tab is now immediately visible. Do check out our informative and fun schedule. For example, we have added a July 4th Elderflower Power Day open to the public.

Steering Committee Core Members

Chris Patton, Managing Director, Processing & Marketing

Paul Otten, (Installation & Cultivation) = Production Protocols, Nurseryman, Berry Consultant/Mentor

Aaron Wills, Promotion & Finance

Dan Moe, (Installation) = Plant Establishment & Cultivation

Bob Olson, Cooperative Development Services liaison