

Non-Timber Forest Product Marketing Systems and Market Players in
Southwest Virginia: A Case Study of Craft, Medicinal and Herbal, Specialty Wood, and
Edible Forest Products

by

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(ABSTRACT)

Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) are important in rural southwest Virginia as a source of household sustenance and supplemental income. The trade in NTFPs from this region is centuries old and now helps supply growing worldwide demands. Although marketing is a vital part of optimizing the value of these products, it has been ignored in rural natural resource development. This research analyzed marketing systems for selected NTFPs in southwest Virginia by describing marketing chains, interpreting data on important marketing elements, and comparing results within and between different groups of NTFPs. Product categories studied are crafts (grapevine wreaths, baskets, furniture, and birdhouses), medicinal and herbal products, specialty wood products (musical instruments), and edible forest products. This qualitative, exploratory study utilized direct interviews with fifty market players at various levels in marketing chains.

Results provide information on NTFP products, value addition, market outlets, pricing, promotion, distribution, and marketing chains. Hundreds of people are involved with the NTFP trade in southwest Virginia and marketing can help ameliorate negative effects of job scarcity. The greatest opportunity for local level marketing exists for market players of crafts and specialty wood products. Medicinal and herbal products are the only category which very little local value addition takes place within the region and as a result, market players have minimal control over marketing. Edible forest products are not marketed but are collected only for consumption in the household. Several opportunities for marketing include improving market access for crafts and specialty wood products, increasing production through cultivation for medicinal and herbal products, and developing capacity for edible product cultivation.