Non-timber resources from forest and rural lands offer income potential for landowners. The variety of products and market channels possibilities, however, make it challenging to realistically assess the opportunities associated with agroforestry products. It begins with an assessment of the natural resource base and its potential for supporting an agroforestry enterprise. Along with the natural resource base, a personal assessment is required to determine the time and financial resources one is willing to devote to developing an enterprise. Specialized knowledge is often required in order to be successful. Niche product marketing requires expertise in order to establish credibility with buyers. An investment in research and patience is required to build a successful enterprise.

**What are the non-timber forest product opportunities?** A variety of products can be harvested or produced in the woods and in rural areas. The major categories include the following:

1) Edible Products - includes mushrooms, wild fruits and berries, nuts, ramps, fiddleheads, herbs, syrup, honey, etc. most of which are sold as specialty foods
2) Forest Botanicals - includes wild plants used for medicinal or pharmaceutical purposes, aromatic plants, plants for dyeing, etc. often sold to herbalists or for craft purposes

3) Decorative Products - includes evergreens, vines, berries, foliage, cones, etc. sold commonly in the floral trade

4) Specialty Wood Products - wood that is used for special purposes such as woodcrafts, barrels, baseball bats, canes, gun and tool handles, baskets, etc.

5) Native Wild Plants - seeds or cones, and native plants may be collected for nursery sales

6) Wood Byproducts - include chips, sawdust, shavings, bark, charcoal, cooking wood, etc. sold for a variety of uses from landscapes to animal bedding or as fuel wood

7) Rural and forestlands can also be used for tourism or recreation enterprises. Each of the above categories has a wide variety of product and marketing options. The biggest challenge may be choosing which to pursue.

Planning the enterprise—where to begin? Planning the enterprise begins with arming yourself with information...learn as much about the opportunities as possible before you invest money. Search the internet to find out about what exists. Follow this with phone calls to the Extension Service, state Conservation department and USDA Forest Service. Find out if there are any producer organizations where you can link with other entrepreneurs already involved in some of these enterprises. Armed with information, consider which of the opportunities match your interests and will most likely produce the results you want from an enterprise including
income, hobby or personal fulfillment, or land stewardship pursuits. The enterprise being considered should make use of available resources including the land base, climate, facilities, equipment, knowledge and financial capacity. An important consideration external to the land is the market for the products you are considering. Consideration must be given about whether there is a local or regional market or if the product will require distant markets accessed by a variety of means. Each market has its unique requirements for product quality and preparation that will need to be considered in planning the enterprise. Once the market opportunities and requirements are known, it is time to outline the steps required from harvest to market and what it will likely cost to produce a product according to market specifications. It may be necessary to run the numbers on several products before deciding which to pursue. Careful planning will help you come up with the enterprise opportunities that most likely will achieve your goals.

**Alternative Selling Strategies**

Two options need to be considered when choosing how to market non-timber forest products—whether to sell raw products or value added or processed products. Advantages and disadvantages of each alternative need to be considered. Raw products are basically ready to market requiring no further processing therefore little or no investment in processing equipment. On the other hand, raw product prices are lower resulting in lower returns relative to labor required, and they may require a higher volume and often there are very few buyers of raw products. Processed or value added products have the benefit of potentially higher returns and more buyers given the variety of market channels these products may enter. Often the amount of raw ingredients in value added products are low so volume requirements are less. Of course, value added production or processing involves additional labor, processing equipment and higher
packing and promotional costs to market the products. Projected costs and returns should serve to guide decisions relative to selling strategies.

**Alternative Market Channels**

Given the variety of non-timber forest products, a large number of market channels exist as venues for sales. The choice of a market channel will depend on the volume of product, whether the product is being sold raw or processed/added-value, the variety of products available for sale, the proximity to market and the cost of marketing relative to potential returns. Direct to consumer sales are attractive because it cuts out the middleman but the time involved in marketing is greater as is the need for a greater variety of value-added products. Farmers' markets, direct retail sales, craft shows, the internet and mail order are common direct to consumer marketing channels. Product quality and selection are a must for direct sales as one to one selling demands a high standard. Direct sales to retailers is another venue for non-timber forest products. Depending on the product, retailers may include craft shops, gift stores, farm markets, food stores, grocery chains, restaurants, florists and mail order/internet sales. The less processed items are most commonly sold to a wholesale buyer who may then sell to a processor or distributor. Wholesale sales provide a reliable outlet and the least amount of effort but the standards required for quality are often stringent and quantity and reliability are a must. Putting all ones eggs in one wholesale buyer's basket can at times be risky as these buyers may be fickle. Contracts, often required by processors, may reduce flexibility in marketing. The critical point in selecting a marketing channel is to know what the customer wants and to be sure you can supply them consistently with what they want.

**Market the Product Attributes**

A successful marketing strategy will depend on how you position your product. Key words that attract consumer attention that can be applied to
non-timber forest products include natural, sustainable, native, original, local-regional, traditional...all conveying something about the product which the customer values. Other attributes of non-timber forest products include health, well-being and gourmet. For enterprises that offer rural recreation, experience benefits need to be marketed. Offering experiences that re-connect people to nature, to one of a kind learning experiences, to heritage and tradition while soaked with amenities and extra special treatment are important assets for the rural tourism enterprise.

**Finding your Niche**

Success in marketing non-timber forest products begins with selecting the products that will allow you to use your resources in a creative way, that allow you to develop products to their fullest, that maximize market potential by satisfying consumer expectations by focusing on the unique attributes of what you have to offer. It will take research and time to develop a successful enterprise that, if well thought out, can achieve your goals whether for income, personal satisfaction, or stewardship of the land. Start close to home and branch out from there.