Non Timber Forest Products

By: David Hamilton, Nolan Gierc, Nathan Reece, Sam Clarke, Manar Kulkhan & Matthew Devine

Introduction

Non-Forest products are also commonly referred to as Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) (Hamilton, 1998). They are biological products other than wood and wood byproducts harvested from forests. They can be harvested in a forest, from tree farm plantations or from individual stems outside a stand.

NTFP are important because they have nutritional, cultural and economic value. In many small communities and developing nations NTFP are used to prepare meals and fill nutritional requirements. Some cultures place social importance on forest products and they can fill spiritual needs. The economic value of NTFP is difficult to measure but in British Columbia it has been roughly valued at $600 million.

In 1991 the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) established the Non-Wood forest products (NWFP). The forest products division developed the NWFP branch to assist in the sustainable harvesting and utilization of NTFP. The FAO: NWFP is also dedicated to improving biodiversity, improving income and generating a sustainable food supply. (UNFAO, 2016).

Social, Cultural and Economic Value

In 2006, the annual contribution of all NTFPs in Canada was estimated to be between $689 million and $1.26 billion (Natural Resources Canada 2006), in BC this estimate was around $250 million (Gov, BC). The two dominant NTFP sectors (floral greenery and mushrooms) is estimated to be $50 million to $80 million between 1996 and 2006 (Hobby et.al, 2006) However data is difficult to obtain for BC and most figures provided are estimates or best guesses. One thing that is clear however, is that NTFP’s are increasing in popularity and the sector has seen a continued growth of the last 15 to 20 years.

Well documented evidence of first nations use of NTFP’s for both personal use and for trade of other goods. They have developed knowledge that has been passed down through generations and are able to utilize a number of Non timber products for benefits such as health. NTFP’s are also important worldwide, especially in rural and less developed countries such as India where these products are needed to improve families livelihoods.

The benefit of land managers to manage for NTFP’s is increasing especially with the shifting focus away from clear-cut logging. Benefits to both land productivity and economic value can be possible when managing for NTFP alongside timber.

Market Outlook

Non timber Forest products represent an emerging market in the forest industry. Consumer preferences are fueling the increase in demand for local, natural and organic products. Creative and innovative marketing techniques will be required to find consumers.
Products

Cork
One of the major, or most well known NTFP is Cork. Cork is the bark from a Cork Oak Tree or *Quercus Suber*. The bark from these trees are harvested every nine years as that is the approximate time it takes for the bark to fully grow back. Cork is a light, flexible and compressible material with high insulation properties. These characteristics help to protect the tree from forest fires as well as insect and fungal attack. After the cork is harvested it is boiled, graded and cut into workable pieces. At this stage it will be sorted depending on its desired end use. Most people think about wine corks when they think of cork but that is only one end-use of this material. In reality cork is used for a vast amount of other products. For example cork is also used in floor panels, furniture, shoe soles, aircraft fuselages as well as many other applications.

Berries and Mushrooms
In BC an example of a NTFP that has a large industry base is the mushroom harvesting industry (Berch, 2007). It is a major source of employment during the harvesting season and it is estimated that over 30,000 BC residents rely in part or whole on mushroom harvesting as a source of income. Haida Gwaii alone annually produces 250,000 pounds of mushrooms per year (Mitchell & Tedder 2000). Some plant species native to BC are most commonly encountered in the wild due to their difficulty to cultivate. Some examples from BC include Huckleberries, Salmonberries and Soupalilli. Other berries such as cranberries and blackberries have had more success in cultivation and have agricultural presence.

Forest Plant Extracts
Plant extracts can be used to create an endless amount of things, including pharmaceuticals, beauty products, syrup and essential oils. One of Canada's most well known product in this category is Maple Syrup. Another very interesting plant extract is Taxol, which is found in Pacific Yew Trees. Taxol is being used in chemotherapy treatment for breast, esophageal, prostate and lung cancer.

Medicine
We all know that there are many plants around us that are edible, however few people recognize how important some simple plants, shrubs, ferns, roots, and flowers can be to our health! From ancient cultures, to modern cutting edge medicine some of the most exciting medical discoveries are the ones yet to be discovered! Some of the most common “drugs” like Aspirin was created from Willow Bark; yet there are more subtle remedies like dandelion root and a newly discovered “Blushwood Berry” in Australia that destroys tumors on contact. The world of medicinal plants is truly exciting and a diamond in the rough for the potential possibilities.

Ornamental Products
Forest resources can be used to create decorative and artistic products. Christmas trees are the leading product in this category of non timber forest products. The seasonal industry is worth about 40 million annually (NR Canada). Other products like wreaths and baskets can be made from debris left behind following logging activates.

Conclusion
Continued expansion of NTFP with new products and markets being more accessible, and the increasing knowledge of the benefits some NTFP can have to both people and the environment. More focus on sustainability which in turn means better land use optimization and more demand for locally produced and organic resources (Agroforestry). And finally better working relationships and collaborations with first Nations to share knowledge. However challenges such as better regulation of the sector needs to be looked at to help better account and manage for the resources.
References


