

Highlights of the International American Ginseng Expo

by Robert Eidus, MPCA Recipient, 2009 & Susan Leopold

An historic event took place in Mills River, North Carolina (outside Asheville) in early December, 2012 when the North Carolina Natural Products Association held a "wild and wild-simulated" American Ginseng Exposition. This gathering accomplished a number of "firsts". It was the first "wild" American ginseng conference that excluded cultivated and sprayed woods-grown plants. The conference was also unique in that it had a well-received "value-added" American ginseng panel geared toward export of value added products instead of roots, demonstrating the potential for expansion in the American and international markets. The expo was also the first time Bob Beyfuss, Scott Persons, Dr. Jeanine Davis, and Robert Eidus were together discussing their knowledge of wild-simulated American ginseng. The event was dedicated to Andy Hankins, who recently passed away. Andy was an extension agent for the state of Virginia. He taught at UpS events and helped many small farmers start ginseng, among many other incredible projects geared towards small farms, such as cut flowers and herbs. You can read about Andy Hankins and his research at <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/author/h/hankins-andy-res.html>.

Three staff members from Washington, DC regulating agencies were there and were excited about wanting to see efforts towards a "wild-simulated" American ginseng conversation program. A wonderful presentation was given by the West Virginia ginseng coordinator about a three-year old "wild-simulated" ginseng program that has been very successful. West VA is leading by example of what states can do if they are serious about wild-simulated ginseng as a non-timber forest product.

The event was well attended, and those who were there were well rewarded with food that was what I call "beyond organic", since it was all sourced locally from our NCNPA friends and businesses. The highlight of the reception was the Ginseng Chicken with wild mushrooms, and did I mention the ginseng truffles? The after-hours get-together included ginseng wine and a performance by a local flute player and Doug Elliot. On the UpS website you can see Doug perform "Ginseng", a song written by Jim Duke. This event was recorded by Ned Doyle and will soon be made available; for further info about the taping and the event go to www.ncnaturalproducts.org. Several interviews about the event were featured on a wonderful radio show www.oursoutherncommunity.org.

A really interesting and innovative aspect to the expo was a polling of questions that took place live, as each person was given a remote

clicker to answer a survey on important questions. For example, one of the questions asked was if local native ginseng seeds should be available to growers, and nearly 90% answered yes. In answer to the question whether the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should change the age restriction for the export of wild ginseng roots, 5% thought it should be lower, 21% said it should be raised, 26% thought it should stay the same and 42% needed more information. There was deep concern expressed about the rapid decline in wild populations, and there was enthusiasm about those who grow ginseng locally figuring out how to market "NC ginseng" in locally made value added products. The Natural Products Association helped make the in person survey happen, as well as the expo. There was also a concern and a need expressed that those who choose to plant ginseng do so with local germplasm as a source for seeds, versus buying ginseng seeds from farms in Wisconsin.



From left to right: Robert Eidus, Dr. Jeanine Davis, Scott Persons, and Bob Beyfuss



Dr. Maria S. McIntosh, Professor of Plant Science, University of Maryland, published researcher in regards to ginsenoside content and variation among and within wild populations of American Ginseng with Susan Leopold, PhD, UpS Executive Director

The conference was covered by the Hendersonville Times under the headline, "Forest farming key to saving wild ginseng from extinction." The key point mentioned was that "Conference speakers agreed that more ginseng must be grown on private lands by forest farmers to take the pressure off wild populations on federal lands, which have been hard-hit by drought, poaching, and decades of intense collecting pressure". Pat Ford, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, was quoted as saying, "Getting more ginseng grown on private lands is key to sustainability of ginseng long term."