

The First International Symposium on Elderberry



June 9-14, 2013 | Stoney Creek Inn | Columbia, Missouri, USA

Elderberry Farmers Forum June 13, Columbia, MO 2013

Evaluation Report

The University of Missouri Center for Agroforestry (UMCA) developed a set of two surveys to evaluate the results of the Elderberry Farmers Forum set of workshops held on June 13, 2013 in Columbia, Missouri. The Farmers Forum was part of the First International Symposium on Elderberry held in Columbia, MO at Stoney Creek Inn, June 9-14, 2013.

The symposium was the world's first gathering of international scientists from multiple disciplines studying all aspects of the elderberry plant and fruit, and its use as a food and dietary supplement. The Producers Forum was held immediately following the scientific portion of the Symposium, on June 13-14, consisting of two days of additional exchange among elderberry scientists and producers / processors. The first day, June 13 consisted of a set of workshops held at Stoney Creek Inn and was followed by a farm visit and hands-on activities on June 14 at the Eridu Farm in Hartsburg, MO.

On June 13, the forum started with plenary presentations by international scientists and practitioners followed by concurrent sessions: track 1- elderberry production and track 2 - elderberry marketing and development.

About half of farmers attended the whole symposium and about half attended only the Farmers Forum. Some researchers who presented or attended the scientific part of the symposium participated also in the Farmers Forum some of them as presenters, some as attendants.

At the beginning of the workshop, a survey was administered to all participants to assess both their motivation to participate in this event and the level of knowledge about the topics presented. At the end of the day, a second survey was administered to assess the participants' perception about the event, to determine the level of satisfaction with the content and organization, the gain in knowledge after listening to the presentations, assess how the workshop changed their interest in elderberry and future plans.

The survey had the following objectives:

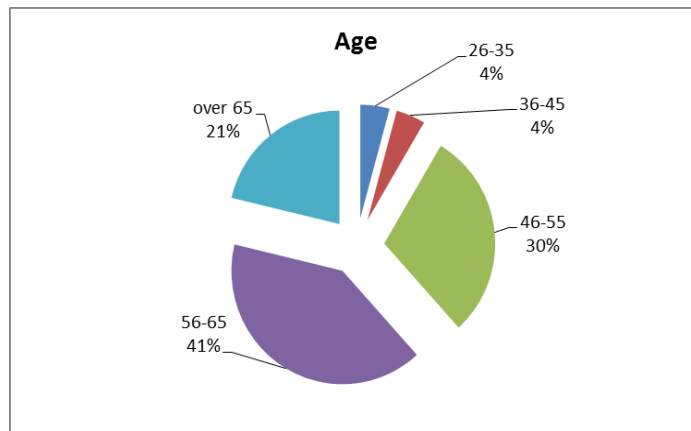
1. Document the demographic characteristics of the participants at the Elderberry Farmers Forum.
2. Identify participants' motivation to attend the event.
3. Evaluate participants' reaction to the content and organization of the set of workshops.

4. Assess the level of knowledge before the workshops related to specific topics and compare it with the level of knowledge after the workshops to estimate the gain in knowledge.
5. Obtain suggestions that will help better organize similar events in future years.
6. Assess participants' initial interest in elderberry and how the interest changed after participating in this forum.

Objective 1: Document the demographic characteristics of the participants at the Elderberry Farmers Forum.

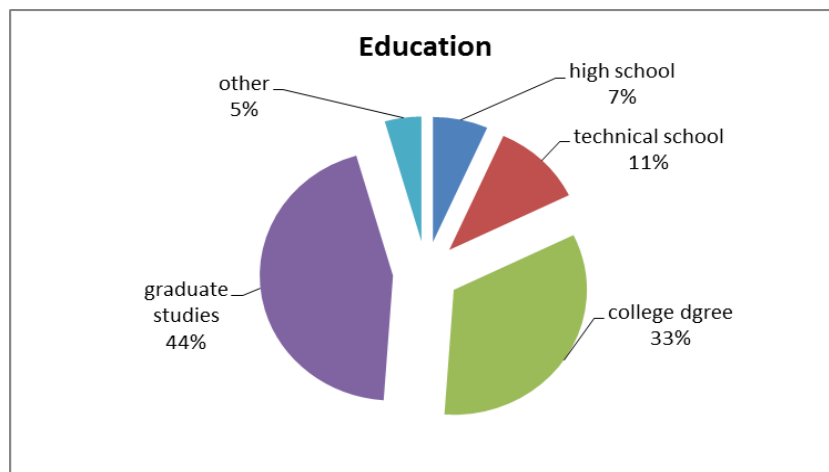
About 120 people (including organizers and presenters) participated in the Farmers Forum. The demographic characteristics, based on 47 surveys collected at the beginning of the event are as follows:

Eight percent of respondents were younger than 45 years, 30% between 46 and 55 years old, 41% between 56 and 65 years old and 21% over 65 years.



N=47, pre-workshop survey

Eighteen percent of respondents attended high school or technical school, 33% held a college degree and 44% held a graduate degree.

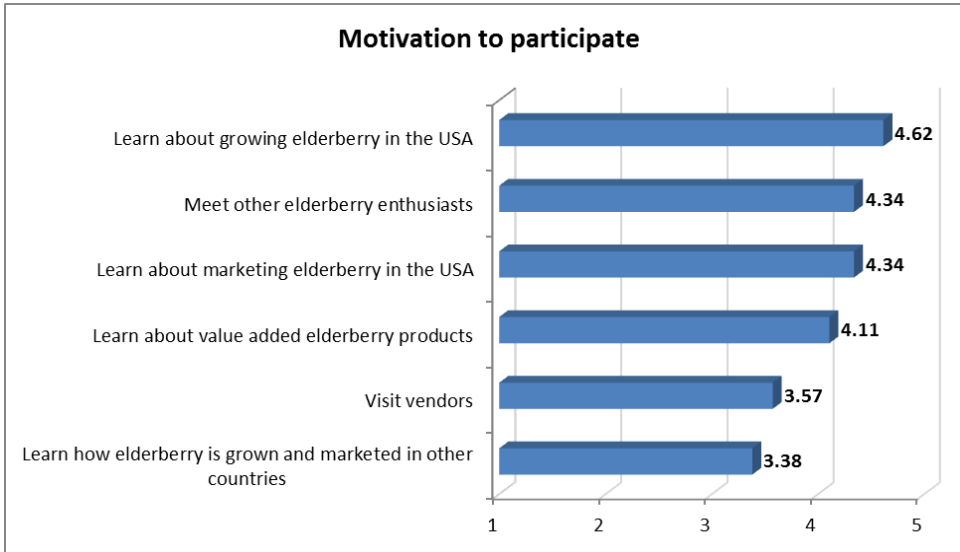


N=47, pre-workshop survey

Objective 2: Identify the motivation to attend the workshop.

Participants at the Producers Forum were mainly interested to learn about growing and marketing elderberry in the USA as well as meeting other people interested in elderberry.

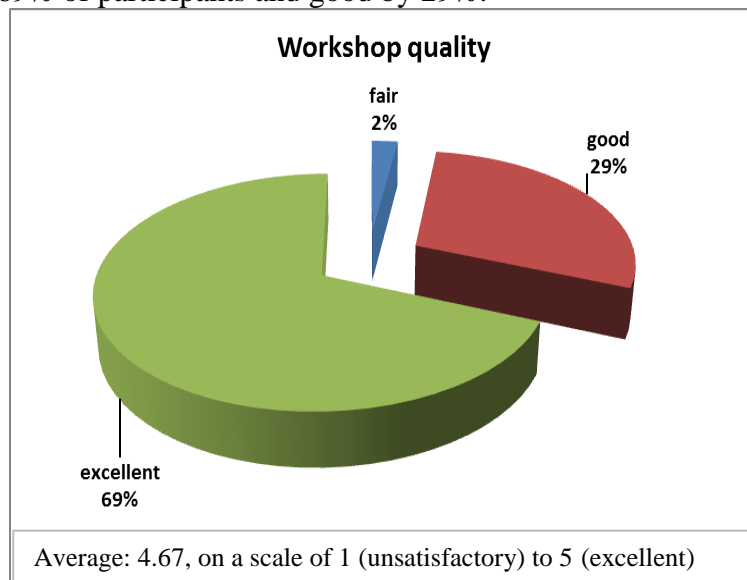
On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much), the average ratings for how much each topic motivated the participants to register for this forum are presented below:



N=47, pre-workshop survey

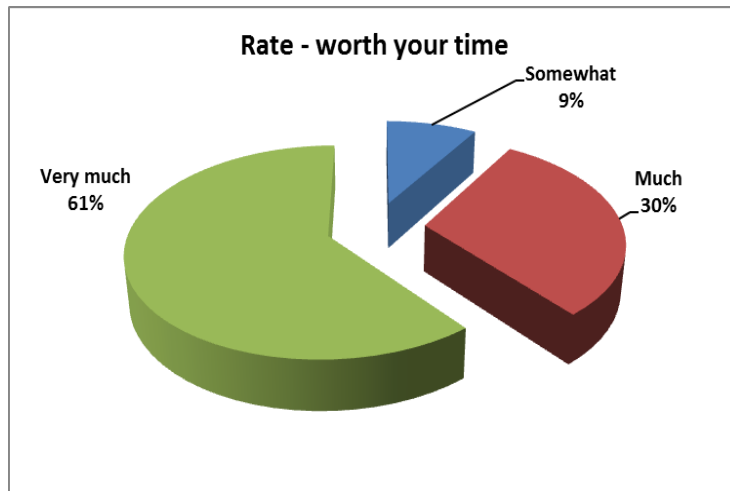
Objective 3: Evaluate participants’ reaction to the content and organization of the workshop

Participants were very satisfied with the Producers Forum. The quality of workshop overall was rated excellent by 69% of participants and good by 29%.



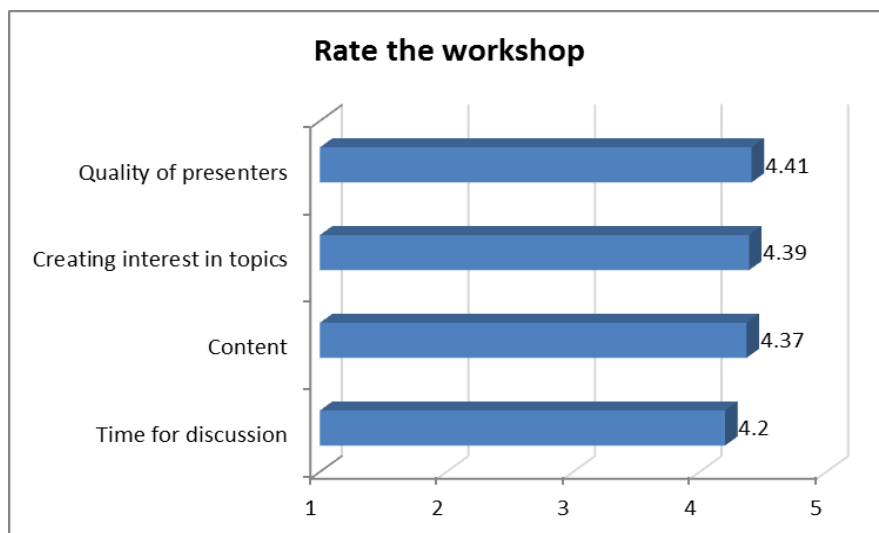
N=46, post-workshop survey

Sixty-one percent of respondents declared that participating in the workshop at the Producers Forum was worth their time “very much” and 30% “much”.



N=46, post-workshop survey

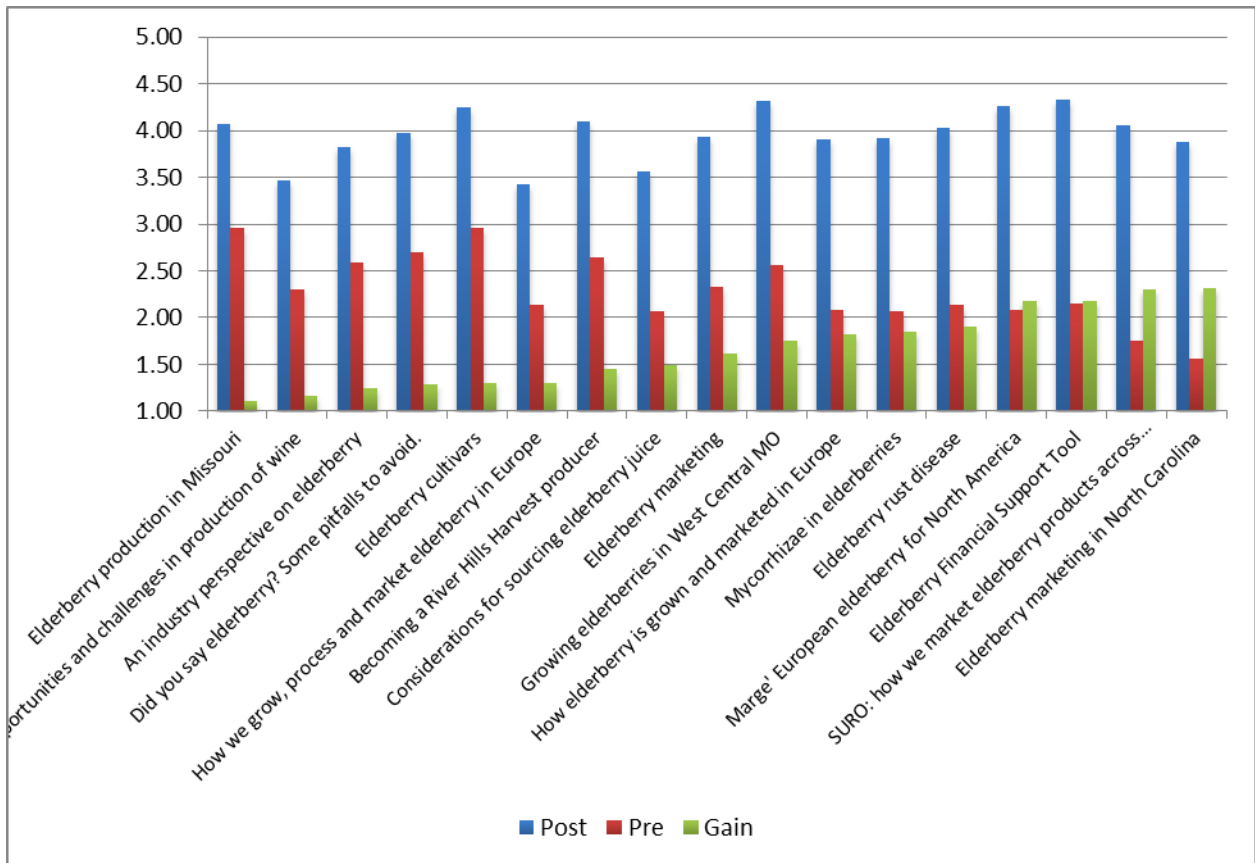
The quality of presenters was rated 4.41 average on a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Creating interest in the topic was rated 4.39 on a scale of 1 (boring) to 5 (stimulating). Content of presentations received a 4.37 rating on a scale of 1 (of little use) to 5 (useful) and time for discussion received a score of 4.2.



N=46, post-workshop survey

Objective 4: Assess the level of knowledge before the workshop related to specific topics and compare it with the level of knowledge after the workshop (Pre (N=47) and Post (N=46) workshop surveys).

A scale of 1 (nothing), 2 (very little), 3 (some), 4 (quite a bit) and 5 (a lot) was used to assess the level of knowledge. The level of knowledge before, after and the gain in knowledge is presented below (average ratings):



Participants had some limited knowledge about the topics presented (between 1.1 and 2.3 in average on the 1-5 scale) by participating in previous workshops or self study. After the workshop, the average knowledge ranged between 3.42 to 4.33 on the scale of 1-5, each topic obtaining a gain in knowledge.

Objective 5: Obtain suggestions that will help better organize similar events.

The workshop participants provided many comments and suggestions regarding the workshop’s topics and organization. Their comments are presented below.

What from this series of workshops were most helpful to you?¹:

Workshop participants found a lot of good information in the topics presented at the workshop, especially those related to elderberry cultivation and marketing.

<i>Wide variety of topics; varying degrees of info</i>
<i>Overall knowledge</i>
<i>Pests, pruning, practices, mulch, irrigation</i>
<i>Cultivar discussion, exposure to Marge variety</i>
<i>Cultivars, diseases, how to grow</i>
<i>Explanation on new regulations</i>
<i>I've learn a lot about cultivars & harvest & growing methods</i>
<i>Identifying the needs in the market and who and how to get things done with elderberry</i>

¹ Text in italic represents exact quote

<i>Marketing, GAP</i>
<i>Pests and diseases</i>
<i>Propagation</i>
<i>University of Missouri presentations, NC marketing strategies</i>
<i>What varieties grows the best in Missouri</i>
<i>Production protocol, Plant pathology and entomology, cultivar description</i>
<i>Growers presenting methods. European growers' inputs.</i>
<i>Overview of where the market is and rules and regulations in developing market</i>
<i>Photos and anecdotes regarding growing tips; info/descriptions of various cultivars; maintenance and disease prevention</i>
<i>Cultivars that were most productive</i>
<i>Getting a basic understanding of where research and production is</i>

Besides the information presented, participants found the interaction with other growers, and between producers and researchers very valuable.

<i>Meet people with different perspectives and experiences.</i>
<i>Hearing real world experiences from local producers</i>
<i>Networking with fellow growers</i>
<i>An opportunity to have a direct exchange between producers and researchers</i>
<i>As I am just getting started, it was the information (and advice) that has been most helpful.</i>
<i>Connecting with people in various stages of production</i>
<i>Contacts</i>
<i>Grower comments</i>
<i>Talking with growers</i>
<i>Discussions by growers of their experiences in growing elderberry. Discussions of their processes and successes</i>
<i>Experienced growers sharing their knowledge</i>

What wasn't covered in this workshop that you expected?

Respondents shared some of the topics that they would have liked to see covered or presented in more detail during these workshops.

<i>Fertilization, amount and techniques</i>
<i>How to produce/source "clean" plants/cuttings</i>
<i>I might learn more about the costs/benefits of making elderberry juice here vs. buying European concentrate</i>
<i>Irrigation systems</i>
<i>Harvesting, processing, berries</i>
<i>Machine harvest method, de-stemming options</i>
<i>More info needed on organic methods and markets</i>
<i>More on organic treatment of soil preparation, fertilizing, pest control, companion planting</i>

<i>I would have liked more advice regarding navigation of federal programs</i>
<i>What and where is the market for elderberry? How profitable is producing (per acre) on average? What is minimum acreage to be profitable?</i>
<i>Where to sell?</i>
<i>Production of items beyond wine</i>
<i>More on developing co-ops; Facilitation the formation of National and Regional Elderberry Association</i>

Besides that, one participant expected more detail on topics (*Could drive deeper on topics. I now know a little about a lot. Need to know more about a lot in elderberries*) while for another one the information presented was too technical (*It was a bit too technical for my level of education*). Various attendants were at different stages of involvement with elderberry and it was difficult to provide to each of them according to their needs.

Do you have any comments/ recommendations regarding the content or organization of this forum that can help us organize better events in the future?

Some respondents suggested providing better directions to the location of the event. Another suggestion was to provide participants with links to presentations and information about presenters. Some growers participated at the scientific part of the symposium, some not. The ones that only came for the Producers Forum, felt that they needed more time for discussion and interaction with scientists and other growers. Also, some respondents preferred to only have one track of presentations instead of two so they can attend more and get information on both, production and marketing and not only on one of them.

All the comments are provided below:

<i>Map to finding location of conference</i>
<i>No split courses, one class at a time</i>
<i>List address/map of symposium site. Took some time to find it. Not clearly visible from the highway.</i>
<i>Plan more Q&A time for growers. As a grower I felt I missed a lot by not attending the first part of the week</i>
<i>Since so much was presented it would be great if talks, papers, presentations would be made available online or on DVD</i>
<i>Provide links to power point presentations along with email & website info on presenters</i>

Objective 6. Assess participants’ initial interest in elderberry and how the interest changed as a result of the workshop

Before the workshop we asked: Tell us a few words about your involvement and interest in elderberry. Participants varied greatly in level of involvement and interest, from active growers already involved in commercial production, to beginning growers that are propagating plants or want to expand production, to people exploring their interest in potentially growing elderberry as a new farm crop or to use elderberry from the wild. Here are their comments:

<i>Began production in 2012, small scale 1/3 acre, hope to expand</i>
<i>Beginning producer</i>

<i>Certified organic 4.5 acre farm in MN with about 1/4 acre elderberry</i>
<i>Grower</i>
<i>Grower with 1/2 acre</i>
<i>Grower, 1 acre + of elderberries</i>
<i>Grower, wholesale marketer, grower coop organizer</i>
<i>Growing berries</i>
<i>Growing, processing</i>
<i>Have approximately 600 plants & plan to focus on marketing Oklahoma native plants and products</i>
<i>I am a grower and have 7,500 plants on a certified organic farm</i>
<i>I am cultivating "wild crafting" on my property now</i>
<i>I have elderberry on my land and have had a very successful crop of plants and wish to grow elderberry as a crop</i>
<i>I have some plants. Investigating scaling up production and serving the food/medicinal market</i>
<i>I recently planted elderberries, so a great interest</i>
<i>One acre, 960 plants Bob Gordon & Wyldewood Cellars plus 8 test plants of Marge planted in 2011</i>
<i>Perennial fruit farm in MN with 1/4 acre of elderberries</i>
<i>As a fruit grower, growing orchard fruit, we also want to try the elderberry for market, medicine and income</i>
<i>Consider becoming a producer</i>
<i>Farmer, 3 years, 3 orchards</i>
<i>Have harvested and used for years personally, grows well in the area, looking for something to add value to the farm</i>
<i>I am interested in growing elderberries and have been preparing my farm for planting a few years ago. I attended Terry Durham's workshop at his farm and now, I am here to learn as much as I can and network with other growers, researchers, and industry representatives.</i>
<i>I am interested in planting 10-30 acres for commercial production</i>
<i>I hope to learn more about growing elderberries in MO.</i>
<i>Just purchased a small farm south of Belle Mo. Interested in growing if not too capital intensive</i>
<i>Used wild elderberries for jellies, juice, pies. Interested in growing elderberry commercially</i>
<i>We farm for human health, so all aspects of all products supporting or enhancing human wellness are of extreme value to us</i>
<i>We plan to start an elderberry farm</i>
<i>Would like to grow elderberry mostly for health reasons</i>
<i>My interest grows rapidly as I learn more - both science and growing aspects</i>
<i>Made wine, made selections of plants from the wild</i>

After the workshop, we asked: Has your interest in elderberry changed in any way after participating in this workshop? How? What are your plans regarding elderberry?

Many respondents increased their interest in elderberry as a result of the workshop (75%). According with their initial involvement, most plan to expand and pursue commercial production, to add or expand production of value added products while others plan to get started.

<i>Still figuring out the plan</i>
<i>Unsure, probably increase number of plants</i>
<i>Continue to develop my knowledge of elderberry</i>
<i>Try to plant 1/2 - 1 acre to start</i>
<i>Planting 1-2 acres</i>
<i>Expanding planting. Currently at 1/2 acres. Eventually 2-3 acres</i>
<i>Plant 4-5 acres plus process fruit</i>
<i>More research, and planting</i>
<i>Begin growing commercially</i>
<i>Begin harvesting, search for superior wild types</i>
<i>Complete evaluation to decide on scale</i>
<i>Hope to establish orchard of cider apples and elderberries</i>
<i>Continue</i>
<i>Continue to grow growing operation</i>
<i>Continue to plant up to 12 acres</i>
<i>Continue with original plans but some changes based on info from this symposium</i>
<i>Grow</i>
<i>Grow broader and deeper</i>
<i>Growing</i>
<i>I want to do more</i>
<i>Improve product manufacturing & packaging & thinking about how to improve relations with growers in order to meet GAP requirements</i>
<i>My interests are towards flowers and what they can contribute to health market</i>
<i>Plant more</i>
<i>Possibly expand</i>
<i>Produce more plants for sale, produce ag. bulletin for distribution nationally</i>
<i>Production</i>
<i>Raise for production, research more on flower use</i>
<i>25 acres, de-stemming and freezing, producing wine</i>
<i>Still high. Continue to expand our growing operation to 15 acres over the next 3 years.</i>
<i>Strengthened. Expand production, plant Marge</i>

To begin growing next year

To eliminate some of my varieties in my plantation & re-plant with varieties I've learned of here.

In conclusion, the Producers Forum set of workshops, held as part of the First International Elderberry Symposium was very successful. The event strengthened communication among people interested in elderberry production, among them and established producers and among them and researchers. The scientific and international perspective added a lot to the forum. There was a significant gain in knowledge that improved the understanding of the design and application of elderberry production and marketing. The workshop helped advance towards adoption of elderberry as a profitable crop across Missouri and the U.S.

The participants' comments and recommendations are a valuable resource for improving future efforts in organizing similar events and for increasing farmers' awareness, acceptance and adoption of elderberry as a profitable crop.