

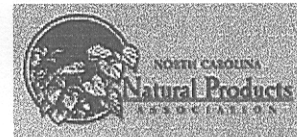
North Carolina Naturally

High Country Represented At Natural Products Association Meeting

By Miles Tager

With its varied topography, North Carolina has always been a leader in growing a wide range of natural products that are useful to humans; now a group has been formed to grow the businesses that promote and produce them.

At their upcoming inaugural conference in Asheville later this month, the North Carolina Natural Products Association (NCNPA) will be hearing from numerous such businesses and their representatives, including those from the High Country.



The association “was founded in 2002,” according to board member Jackie Greenfield, in response to the combination of conservation and marketing needs associated with cultivating and selling the state’s incredible natural bounty.

“We came together to connect the growers in North Carolina with the industry nationwide,” Greenfield said.

With a theme of ‘Planting North Carolina’s Medicinal Herb Economy’, the conference at the North Carolina Arboretum will feature over twenty “hands-on workshops,” Greenfield said, and keynote speakers Joe and Terry Graedon, founders of the award-winning The People’s Pharmacy.

The People’s Pharmacy has brought natural product awareness to national attention through the public radio program, syndicated newspaper column, and book series, with the Graedons frequent guests on national television shows like Oprah, Dateline and Good Morning America.

Greenfield hopes the association and the conference will further that goal, and encourage both existing and prospective growers and producers in the state.

Conference attendees will learn how to tap into the worldwide marketplace for many natural products, including many grown in the mountains like ginseng, goldenseal, echinacia and medicinal mushrooms.

“Western North Carolina’s plant biodiversity provides the foundation for a successful natural products industry that can positively impact our economy and at the same time encourage conservation and stewardship of our botanical resources,” according to Arboretum Executive Director and Association President George Briggs.

The Arboretum, the Biltmore Estate, North Carolina State University, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture are all members of the NCNPA, as are many “small farmers and businesses,” Greenfield said.

"We come from all different walks of life."

Conference presenters include Red Alderman of Ashe County, farmer and creator of Wounded Warrior, Ed Fletcher of Strategic Sourcing Inc. in Watauga County, and Tony Hayes of Ridge Runner Trading Co. Inc.

Fletcher will lead workshops on Drying & Packaging of Roots & Herbs and Overview of Commercial Production Practices, and Hayes and Alderman joining with Smithson Mills of the NCDA on Finding Your Niche in the Marketplace.

Hayes will also present on Cleaning & Handling of Roots & Herbs

Other workshops include Methods for Protecting Native Plants, Producing Your Own Stock & Seeds, and Wild-Simulated Ginseng Production.

The key tracks addressed will be Medicinal Plant Horticulture, Adding Value To Herbs, Plant Conservation and Wild-Harvesting, Growing Specific Medicinals, and Getting Down to Business.

The association recognizes four categories of emphasis, Greenfield said; edibles, floral, nursery, and medicinals, and "each involves different marketing."

Greenfield has been working on a report – the first comprehensive one ever in North Carolina – on "non-timber products of North Carolina."

The two-year study "looks at twenty-five counties in Western North Carolina (including all of the High Country) to evaluate all wild harvested products," Greenfield said.

The report, due out shortly, "is a twenty-year project what we had just over 1 ½ years to do," Greenfield said.

"This will be a model for other states," Greenfield said.

The N.C. Natural Products Association conference will be held at the North Carolina Arboretum outside Asheville Monday-Tuesday October 27-28; registration fee is \$75 for NCNPA and Arboretum members; \$95 for the general public.

New booklets featuring North Carolina natural products growers and buyers throughout the United States will be available at the conference – for the first time anywhere – courtesy of the North Carolina Consortium of Natural Medicinal Products; the NCNPA will produce the updated booklets in subsequent years, Greenfield said.

The NCNPA will host a conference annually as well as conduct regional workshops, Greenfield said.

For more information please call the N.C. Arboretum at 828-665-2492 ext. 221 or go to www.ncnaturalproducts.org.