

Info

Where can edible non-timber forest products be sold?

Working Trees



📍 A farmers market display of edible non-timber forest products with value added processing. (Photo by Steve Gabriel)

Increasingly, forest landowners are looking to [non-timber forest products \(NTFPs\)](#) as opportunities to create additional income from their woodlands. Harvesting NTFPs is appealing to landowners who are not interested in harvesting trees or landowners who want to grow a product that generates income in a shorter time-frame than timber harvesting. While there are a variety of types of non-timber forest products including medicinal plants, woody florals, and craft products, this info sheet focuses on forest-based food products, like mushrooms and berries.

Before growing and processing any product, it is important to determine if and how the product will sell. Studying the feasibility of a new business includes understanding consumer demand, competitors and collaborators, processing and food handling requirements, and other aspects of business operations, in addition to the markets themselves.

Edible NTFPs can be sold in a variety of market outlets. These outlets will vary by type of product and by region. Different markets demand different quantities and qualities of products and will have different requirements and regulations. Market outlets may also have preferences about whether products have or have not been processed into value-added goods. Prices will also differ between markets. Many new producers might not consider all the outlet options available to them when they are first starting out. This information sheet outlines a few of the market outlets where edible NTFPs can be sold.

Selling to consumers:

- **Roadside stands:** Some producers of non-timber forest products sell their goods directly from a stand located on or near their property. Product sales can be a part of a larger agri-tourism enterprise. This can be rewarding for producers who enjoy engaging with the public.
- **Farmers markets:** Farmers markets can be an easy location to find customers interested in buying products grown and harvested locally, which includes many edible NTFPs. Growers can explain to customers how a food is grown or how to prepare it. Both unprocessed and value added NTFPs are sold in these venues. The number of farmers' markets is growing across the country.
- **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs:** Though generally focused on farm-grown foods rather than forest-grown foods, some CSAs provide forest products like mushrooms. NTFP producers sometimes partner with more traditional CSAs to supplement farm-grown products with non-timber forest products. CSAs allow growers to receive payments at the beginning of the season for shares distributed throughout the season.
- **Internet:** Some producers have found success selling their products directly to consumers via the internet, usually on their own webpages. Internet sales can have lower transaction costs and can attract new and different customers. The internet can also be used to promote sales to other businesses.

Selling to retailers:

- **Restaurants:** Many restaurants are interested in new, different, and local products, including edible NTFPs. It is important to determine how to set your product apart from the typical product available from wholesale distributors. Consistent high quality and predictable availability



▲ *Woman buys ramps at farmers market. (Photo by Jim Chamberlain)*

can help your product compete. Selling to these restaurants may involve first developing relationships with chefs and other restaurant staff.

- **Grocery stores:** Some producers have success selling edible NTFPs to grocery stores. These stores may purchase NTFPs only in certain seasons or purchase only NTFPs that meet their quantity and quality requirements.

Selling to distributors:

- **Single product distributors:** Some NTFPs have robust existing wholesale markets, particularly in regions where harvesting that particular NTFP is very common. Producers can sell to these wholesale markets, but they may receive low prices particularly at the most common harvesting times.
- **Multi product distributors:** Some NTFPs may not have existing wholesale markets. In these cases, distributors who work with a variety of products may be interested in buying NTFPs to add variety and interest to their line of goods.

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