



ROOTREPORT: PRELIMINARY RESULTS FOR 2014

OUR STUDY

RootReport is an ongoing project of the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation at Virginia Tech. We do market assessment and create extension resources for nontimber forest products. For the last three years we have sent questionnaires to medicinal plant buyers about what products they purchase, how much is being produced and how harvests are distributed around the region. At this stage, we are focusing on medicinal plants in eastern deciduous forests. The data presented here were collected in 2015 and represent products purchased in 2014.

THE PRODUCTS

We received surveys from 22 percent of registered ginseng dealers in our 11 state survey area. Of these, roughly 38 percent reported purchasing other products in 2014. This dropped from the previous year, due to the inclusion of new areas with less production (see below). We asked specifically about 11 roots and one bark (Fig.1). The most commonly purchased were goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*), bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) and black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*), which were also the most commonly purchased in 2013.

12 percent of respondents reported purchasing other products that weren't on our list including stoneroot, Solomon's seal, queen of the meadow/Joe Pye weed, spikenard, black

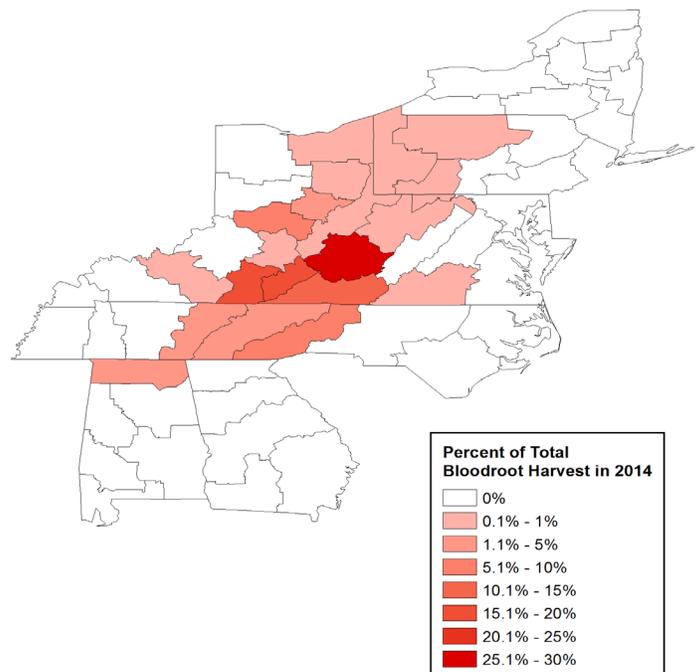
Indian hemp, indigo, witch hazel, wild hydrangea, and mullein. The most common barks not on our list were cherry, sassafras and fringe tree. Five percent reported purchasing nonmedicinal products with the most common being decorative products such as log moss and burl wood, and edibles such as ramps and mushrooms.

DISTRIBUTION

Central Appalachia was again the major supply center in 2014, with southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky and southwest Virginia producing at the highest rates for most of the species we surveyed. The map below shows the reported distribution for the bloodroot harvest, which is typical of the more commonly purchased species (Fig. 2). Of the new areas added last year, only West Virginia and southern Ohio had significant output for our plant list. Based on conversations with participants, we are continuing to explore possible explanations for distribution including abundance of ideal plant habitat, local economic conditions, a history or tradition of harvesting, and access to land.



(FIG.1)

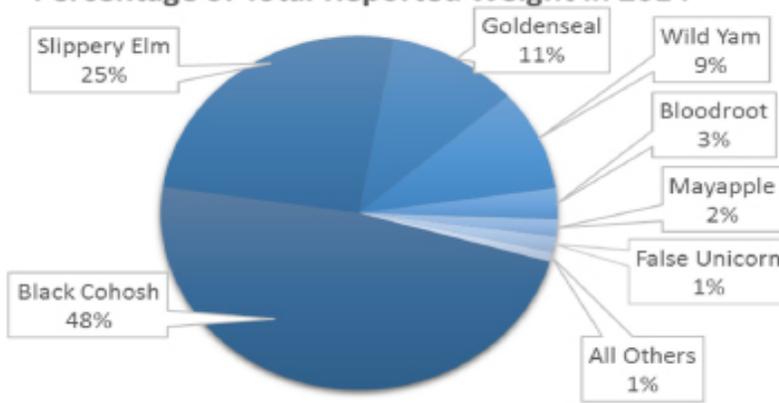


(FIG.2)

OUTPUT

Our goal is to be able to provide estimates for total output for all the plants in the survey. We are still working on making those as accurate and representative as possible by eliminating double-counting and creating a projection that takes the wide array of businesses into account—from herbalists to “country dealers” to larger aggregators. For now, we can demonstrate the products’ trade in relation to the total weight of all the products, represented in the chart below (Fig. 3). Black Cohosh once again made up more of the trade than any other product, at 48 percent of the total weight, followed by slippery elm bark and goldenseal root. It is important to note that these plants vary in size, abundance and value, and the market shifts annually based on demand and availability. These data alone do not reflect the status of wild populations, only the amount being harvested.

Percentage of Total Reported Weight in 2014



(FIG.3)

CHANGE OVER TIME

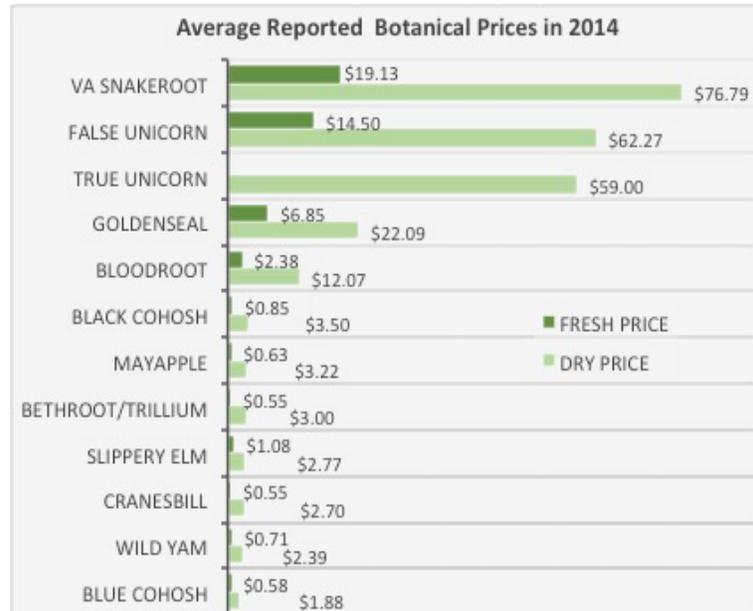
One of the advantages of repeating the study each year is that we can see how trade volume changes over time. The table below represents changes in output for the top three most commonly purchased products between 2013 and 2014, based on people who returned surveys both years (Fig.4). Black cohosh dropped from the previous year. Buyers bought more bloodroot in 2014, and we saw a slight drop in goldenseal.

PRODUCT	CHANGE IN AMOUNT BOUGHT FROM 2013-2014
BLACK COHOSH	-18%
BLOODROOT	+20%
GOLDENSEAL	-5%

(FIG.4)

PRICES

For the first time last year, we asked people to estimate the average price paid to harvesters for the plants on our list in 2014 (Fig. 5). The price per unit does not necessarily reflect the value of the plant itself. Virginia snakeroot had the highest price, but the root is small, whereas slippery elm bark and black cohosh are cheaper by the pound, but are larger in size. While we did see variation in prices, it did not seem to be based on location. A few buyers were willing to pay more for products that were sustainably harvested or cultivated, although cultivated products made up a very small percentage of overall volume. Prices vary over the



(FIG. 5)

season and from year to year. As our project continues we will be able to show how prices change over time, something many respondents said they would like to see.

We want to sincerely thank everyone who participated last year. Without your help, this study would not be possible. The more participation we have, the better our results will be.

In addition to our questionnaire, we have been interviewing people who work in the root and herb trade, and we thank those who took the time to sit down and talk with us. These conversations help us improve our survey and understand the results. People working with roots and herbs are the ones who know the history and current state of the business best, and that perspective is important to us. If you would like to participate, you can contact us at any time for more information.

For more results, a list of nontimber forest product resources and a way to take our survey online please visit us at www.rootreport.frec.vt.edu.

If you have any other questions or concerns please contact us.

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