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I moved back to North Dakota in the mid 70's to my great grandparents' homestead. After attending Minot State University and using knowledge from my Future Farmers of America experience in high school in Devils Lake, I was able to start working for a hybrid seed company as a sales agronomist marketing sunflowers as a cropping option. The NDSU Carrington Research Extension Center was a key resource that led to my success in this career.

This position had me traveling the state where I could see rural families who grew a few fruits and berries. I had grown up with the assumption that North Dakota grew wheat, barley and flax! From my observations; and now, interactions with the Northern Hardy Fruit Project at the Carrington Research Extension Center, I know that we can grow many fruits and berries in North Dakota. Our state has the capability to raise a substantial amount of nutritious fruit and berries and I've done it.

I started to use Soil Conservation District services to plant more trees and incorporated berries and fruit varieties on strips of land on areas of the farm that were inconvenient to farm conventionally (more areas of unfarmed land are now available as farm equipment gets bigger). While my extensive travelling didn't allow me to fully tend to the berries and fruit, I still could enjoy some Juneberries in summer and Crabapples in the fall. Then Aronia berries were introduced to me. The CREC Fruit Project had an extensive wealth of information on the crop. In 2016, I qualified for an EQIP grant to tear down six acres of dead elm trees my grandfather had planted. Besides a row of conifers, I planted Chokecherries, Nanking cherries and Aronia berries. With SCD's improved planting techniques and the addition of fabric, everything flourished.

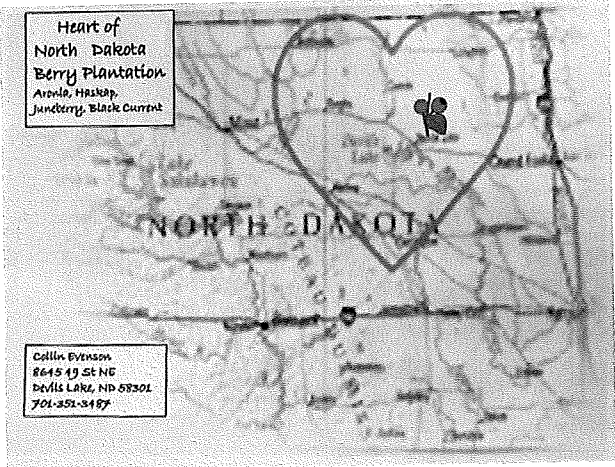
By 2017, there were about 20 North Dakota families using the information and field demonstrations at CREC to grow Aronia berries. There were meetings both on-farm and at CREC, and much enthusiasm to grow Aronia berries. There are 86 acres of Aronia registered with FSA. This is 6.3% of the total acres grown in the US. From our meetings, we know that there are another 22 acres of Aronia planted, as well.

The Aronia berry is Native to North America. Aronia berry was used by the Indigenous people living on the plains. It fits into the growing culture of eating natural, nutritional foods, native to America. Aronia grows in easily harvestable clusters that hold to the branches for up to a month. My wife and I consume about 15 gallons of Aronia Berry a year. We eat it every morning. My wife mixes them into her oatmeal, and I make a banana smoothy with my Aronia. I have Ankylosing Spondylitis and Aronia helps to reduce the inflammation in my joints.

Harvesting, processing and freezing the Aronia berry is an obstacle. There have been discussions about forming a co-op. This time of year, Thanksgiving, I look with envy at the Cranberry growers who formed Ocean Spray. They took a similar crop: sour-tasting, bright color, food of the indigenous people and thru a co-op, built an industry. Aronia berry in North Dakota could become that same industry, with the support of the State Board of Agricultural Research and Education to fund a full-time position for Fruit and Berry Research. I strongly encourage SBARE to fund the Fruit and Berry Research position. It would be an essential key in getting this industry going in North Dakota.

Collin Evenson

Devils Lake, North Dakota



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