Abstract: ISU Extension and Outreach specialists worked with several stakeholder groups to educate southeast Iowa farmers about the aronia berry, a crop new to Iowa with potential for market growth.

Could a potential new and valuable crop, “aronia,” be successfully produced and marketed by a set of newly trained growers? The final answer is not in, but looks very promising. Since the conclusion of this project two of the four original growers have added additional plantings of aronia. The first real harvest would have been in fall of 2012, but April 2012 freeze greatly reduced yield.

What was done and why?
Aronia was selected for this project because it is native to the United States, has no known serious pests, is well adapted to Iowa and is easy to grow organically. Because of the increased interest in healthy foods, the popularity and demand for aronia is increasing in the United States and worldwide. The work was needed because there had not been a study of this new commercial crop in southeast Iowa. Partners in the project included ISU Extension and Outreach representatives, growers and marketers for Hometown Harvest of Southeast Iowa, and the Iowa State Horticultural Society and its affiliate organizations.

Objectives for the project were to:
1. Select four small family farmers in southeast Iowa to participate in the project.
2. Implement a training program that will teach farmers to:
   A. Grow aronia berries for commercial production,
   B. Process and add value to aronia berries, and
   C. Market aronia berries and products made from aronia berries to the local community and to commercial producers of wine, fruit juices and food products.
3. Develop educational presentations about aronia berry production, processing and marketing.
4. Deliver educational programs at field days, workshops, meetings and conferences

What did we learn?
The project increased diversification of small family farms in southeast Iowa by demonstrating the feasibility of production, processing and marketing of aronia berries. It helped develop new markets and effective networks for selling this new crop. This aronia project complemented local food system work being done by Hometown Harvest, a collaborative community food system development effort in southeast Iowa. Aronia also can have a positive environmental impact because it is a native perennial plant that is easy to grow organically with erosion-controlling grass planted between the rows.