

## MARKETING NON-WOOD FOREST PRODUCTS – CO-OPERATION BETWEEN RESEARCH, SMES AND VET

Non-wood forest products (NWFP) like forest berries, mushrooms and herbs provide valuable raw material for the different kind of products. Annually only 3-10% of the annual yield is picked up depending on the species. Therefore, there exists a lot of unused potential for e.g. create new ways of livelihood in rural areas. NWFP have a lot of traditional uses in many countries, also in Finland and their image is usually also connected to the traditional use of nature. Typically the products are not very processed which also reduces the added value of the products. Also they are not seen as “very cool” by younger, new consumers.

There is a need to develop new approaches to marketing NWFP. To enable this new approach, different knowledge bases need to be combined. In addition to the marketing expertise, the health claims used in the products must be verified. However, the companies do not typically have this kind of knowledge or possibility to test out the new types of approaches.

VET organisations or research actors, in many cases, have both the knowledge of the younger consumers’ behavior as well as the equipment that could be used to develop the prototypes of the products. They also have access to research information and networks. The companies are not, nevertheless, familiar with all these possibilities to support their product and marketing development. More interaction and discussions between these parties are needed. In this pilot the co-operation was enhanced in the form of discussion forums, developed in UK. However, to be meaningful the discussion need to focus on some very concrete co-operation activities to attract the companies. Therefore, as a show case, practical co-operation between the University of Helsinki Ruralia Institute, Turku University of Applied Sciences and a company called Lapland Naturals ([www.lapcream.com](http://www.lapcream.com)) was created to find more modern ways to market NWFP and the traditional knowledge based on them.



The idea was to transform traditional marketing, based strongly on rural settings and the beautiful natural environments, to game based marketing and replace the nature pictures with animated figures, “super heroes” with health characteristics. A new product line of Lapland Naturals was used as a pilot for this kind of approach and the example and lessons learnt from it was disseminated to the whole NWFP sector by using a national association called the Finnish Nature-based Entrepreneurship Association ([www.luontoyrittaja.net](http://www.luontoyrittaja.net)). The role of Turku university of applied sciences was to provide information and expertise on animation creation. In addition, the health claims for the animation and products, must be able to be verified. This knowledge was taken from existing clinical research by using the Research network of NWFP, in which Ruralia Institute is a partner.



*Original figures created by the Lapland Naturals (Arctic Warriors)*



*Animated figures created by the students of Turku University of Applied Sciences*

The animation pilot was carried out during autumn 2014-spring 2015. The students worked in this real life case in the guidance of their teacher and the company kept continuous contact with them from Rovaniemi by Skype meetings. Mostly the operationalization went well, however, sometimes it was difficult to safeguard that all parties had a similar understanding on the work. Also the entrepreneurs had to accept that the students work with different schedule than pure business-to-business relationships. To facilitate the discussion forums wider, the aim was also to organize a large event in Rovaniemi at the end of the show case to present it as an example to wider audience and to provide the HE/research, VET and the companies in regional level a forum to get familiar and discuss with each others. Five organisations (Ruralia, Natural Research Institute, Vocational College of Lapland, Lapland University of Applied Sciences and regional chamber of commerce), joined the efforts to organize such an event in October 2015. The aim was to present the co-operation potential of different organisations to local companies as well as provide them a change to visit some facilities, e.g. related to 3D printing, to further explore the co-operation possibilities. However, the event was cancelled due to the lack of participants from the company side. Since the separate event did not succeed, the partners decided to use some existing annual event as a platform for the discussion forum. The pilot was presented in the annual NWFPP conference in Kuusamo. This event attracts every year approx. 100-150 companies, developers and educators related to the sector. It was decided that an established annual event would serve better for the purpose as the participants are easier to reach, even though the discussion forum can only be a small part of the event. Therefore, co-operation with the annual seminar organisers was sought to include the discussion forum element to the seminar also in the future years to keep on continuous discussion.

The reason for the failure of the separate event was also analysed. The marketing was probably not efficient enough, but as companies are very busy, it is difficult to attract them to new events. Especially when they are more general in nature. Therefore, even though the show case co-operation worked well as it provided a concrete task to be solved together, the general cooperation as such is not interesting enough. It can be said that the piloting partners did not remember their own reasoning for the practical concrete tasks (show case) when organising more general event. Therefore, it can be suggested that the discussion forum elements would work the best if they can be included to the existing events rather than organize a separate forums. They are highly needed nevertheless! To underline this further, the practical show case created in the project succeeded well and raised a lot of interest also from the other companies. Also the students saw it useful to work with real life cases, even though there was room for improvement in the communication. Probably personal meetings would have worked better.