



Raspberries and new soft fruits

Project 2008-2010

Expansion Horticulture

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The **Expansion Horticulture** project aims to provide opportunities for increased competitiveness and economical growth of the horticultural industry through innovation and cooperation among producers, advisers, researchers and other stakeholders

The project is funded by;

- *The Swedish Board of Agriculture – The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas*
- *The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences Faculty of Landscape Planning – Horticultural and Agricultural Sciences*
- *LRF-The Federation of Swedish Farmers*
- *The Swedish Rural Economy and Agricultural Societies*
- *The horticultural industry*



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Raspberries and new soft fruits: An Expansion Horticulture project 2008-2010.

By Thilda Nilsson and Birgitta Svensson

Summary

A project on expanding and improving the production of raspberries and other soft fruits was conducted within the framework of the Expansion Horticulture organisation. The aims of the project were to increase production area and overall interest in soft fruit production and to provide new knowledge that can improve and refine cultivation techniques. The growers involved appreciated the project and all activities were well-attended. A network has been created and an internet blog is being used for dissemination of information to members. The project will continue through the new advisor involved and through the course material prepared.

Aim

The project had three main aims of helping to increase the level of crop management, the general interest of prospective growers and the acreage of soft fruit production in Sweden. Raspberry was chosen the main target crop.

1. Increased production and acreage through introduction of modern technology.

An important part of the project was to disseminate new research results concerning crop management and plant protection. One way of improving growers' skills was to organise courses with invited speakers.

2. Increase growers' interest in soft fruit production.

The underlying assumption here was that when the benefits of soft fruits are discussed and occupy more space in the media, interest in their production and overall consumption will increase.

3. Development of communication between researchers and growers and improvement of advisors' and growers' expertise and skills by providing useful tools.

It seems to be important that growers and advisors feel involved in current research that is relevant to their area. The growers have to be aware of the availability of highly skilled advisory services before they will dare to invest in new production areas or improvements to existing areas. Dissemination and documentation of results were priority issues within the project.

Background

Consumption of berries has increased in Sweden in recent years, as has grower interest in production of different soft fruits, mainly raspberries and blueberries. In addition, consumers are demanding more locally produced products. The acreage of raspberries in Sweden is still low compared with that of strawberries, so one of the project aims was to increase the area of raspberries grown. Berries can create positive publicity and contribute to increased interest in horticultural products overall. They can provide quite high turnover on a limited area and may serve as a complementary activity on an agricultural or horticultural production unit. Production in polytunnels and greenhouses provides the scope for an extended season and thereby increased and secure employment. The production of

products that are characterised as high quality is essential to meet the demands of the domestic and long distance market.

Results

The project results comprised activities, dissemination of information and interactions with growers and advisors during the course of the project.

Activities

Course in raspberry production 2008

In November 2009, a two-day course concerning professional raspberry production was provided. The focus of the course was on both conventional and organic farmers. The course comprised much basic information on cultivation techniques, directed at both new and more experienced growers. Lecturers from Sweden, Scotland, Norway and Denmark, whose participation was funded by the County Board of Scania, made the course interesting and up-to-date. The course covered crop management including fertilisation, plant protection and plant material, as well as technical equipment for irrigation and spraying. Just over 50 participants, including growers, advisors, scientists and industry representatives, attended the course and they were generally positive about this learning opportunity.

Field days 2009

April: Two field days in high tunnel raspberry production.

May: Field day with a demonstration project on organic greenhouse production of raspberries and strawberries.

June: Field day with the focus on plant protection in raspberries and small-scale processing.

Course in high bush blueberry production 2010

In January 2010, 60 participants met for a two-day course on blueberry production. Among others, Mrs. Sonja and Mr. Wilhelm Dierking from Germany (nursery plant producers) and blueberry growers attended. Cultivation conditions and techniques, organic production, marketing and practical pruning were the main topics dealt with on the course.

Cultivar trials in raspberries 2010

Evaluation of new cultivars was considered an important issue, since the limited number of cultivars in production has increased plant protection problems. The results of the trials indicate that several of the new cultivars are interesting for production in Sweden. A more robust growth habit seems promising and there are cultivars that could be a healthy complement to, or replacement for, Glen Ample, which dominates production today.

Blueberry trip 2010

The great interest that arose in connection with the blueberry course led to organisation of a study trip to Denmark and Germany in September 2009, with the focus on high bush blueberry production. The tour attracted both new and existing growers, as well as advisors.

Calculations 2010

Financial calculations for raspberries and other soft fruits in both organic and conventional production were developed in cooperation with the Swedish Board of Agriculture and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU. Such economic data had been requested during the project period and are essential in investment applications.

Communication

Website - Raspberry blog

Dissemination of information has been a successful concept since a raspberry blog with associated e-mail database was developed. When something new is published on the blog, it is immediately sent to approx. 140 members. Collection of e-mail addresses is an ongoing project and at every activity new growers are invited to join the mailings.

Other contacts

1. Project information was provided during conference days arranged by Expansion Horticulture in 2009 and 2010 at Alnarp.
2. Mailings were sent to advisors and growers during spring 2008 with a project description and call for suggestions and ideas on requested activities
3. Project presentation at the annual meeting of GRO Bärsektion (Berry Farmers' Association) in February 2008.
4. Project information in 'Newsletter for Berry Growers' published in 2008 by the Swedish Board of Agriculture in Jönköping.
5. An article in the grower magazine 'Viola', spring 2008 .
6. International contacts were established at a conference organised by the IOBC (*International Organisation for Biological Control and Integrated Control of Noxious Animals and Plants*) in France 2008.
7. Exhibitor at the Nordic fruit and berry conference in March 2009 in Ystad and at the Swedish Berry conference in December 2009 in Hook.
8. An article in the magazine 'Skånska lantbruk' 2009, concerning tunnel production of berries.
9. Lecture concerning production of specialist small fruits at an introductory grower course in Östersund in March 2010.
10. Field day with presentation of new cultivars in June 2010.
11. Presentation of cultivar evaluation at the advisor's course in Hässleholm arranged by the Swedish Board of Agriculture in September 2010 and at the Swedish Berry Conference at Hook in December 2010.

Course Module - Fact Sheet

A course module containing eight fact sheets (LTJ Faculty Fact Sheets) was created during the project. These fact sheets will be used as basic documents for courses:

- Raspberries - course module (2011:4)
- Raspberry - establishing a new crop (2011:5)
- Raspberry - crop management in summer raspberries (2011:6)
- Raspberry - crop management in primocane raspberries (2011:7)
- Raspberries – fertilisation (2011:8)
- Raspberries - protected production (2011:9)
- Raspberries - plant protection (2011:10)
- High bush blueberries - crop management (2011:11)

Cooperation

Parts of the project were carried out in partnership with:

- Birgitta Svensson, SLU: Reference group for experimental trials with organic production of raspberries and blackberries in high tunnels.
- Christina Winter, Swedish Board of Agriculture: Demonstration project in an organic berry production unit and work on financial calculations
- Marie-Louise Juhlin, Agricultural Society, Kristianstad: Demonstration project in an organic berry production unit.
- Elisabeth Nilsson, Elite Plant Station: Cultivar evaluation.

Discussion

Benefits

Berries are 'in the news'

We feel that the project has been successful in disseminating information concerning berry production in a way that has increased grower interest in raspberries and high bush blueberries. Our aim was to reach new and established producers, but the media has also appreciated receiving information. Nearly 200 people have signed up for information mailings through the blog, which shows that many people are interested in berries.

New producers and increased acreage

One main aim was to increase the production of specialist berries such as raspberries and blueberries. Progress on this target is not possible to record for such a short period, but the high number of producers attending all activities suggests increasing interest. The high attendance indicates an interest in investment, and training courses have often been followed by a number of consultations regarding start-up of new production units. In particular, interest in tunnel production has increased and there have been many calls concerning start-up of berry production in high tunnels.

Tools

One of the main aims was to provide tools suitable for use by advisors and growers. Seven fact sheets have been produced and they fit into a course module. This course module will be provided in a way that makes it useful for advisors and growers all over the country. The financial calculations for soft fruits developed in collaboration with the Swedish Board of Agriculture are essential tools that are in high demand when a new investment is being discussed.

Consultancy

The present project constituted an educational base for a new advisor. This new advisory service will continue when the project is finished and will contribute to the further development of soft fruit production

Further work

It has been very positive and rewarding to work in such a topical project that proved to be of interest to many people. The high level of interest demonstrated led to well-attended activities and that facilitated the dissemination of information. Our expectation is that the course module material will be useful in national training activities. The increasing interest in production has to be followed-up with more activities within the topic in order to support new growers. Such activities could comprise more research projects and increased availability of advisory services.