

## "From Wild-Collection To Cultivation: Developing A Certification Program For Wild-Simulated Ginseng Growers In Ohio"

### Issue Description

American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) is a perennial understory plant that is native to Ohio and thrives throughout the Appalachian region. Traditionally ginseng plants are harvested from wild populations to meet market demand, which has created concern about population declines in many parts of its native range. Although wild-harvesting is still a large part of the ginseng industry, many people have transitioned to intentionally growing ginseng in their forests using "**wild-simulated**" techniques. Wild-simulated cultivation mimics ginseng's natural growing conditions in order to produce a root that has wild characteristics. Commercially produced seeds are purchased, broadcast on the forest floor, and are then left to grow for 5 to 10 years before harvesting.



American Ginseng - Photo by Eric Burkhart

Under current State and Federal laws wild-simulated ginseng growers are regulated by the laws established to protect wild ginseng. These laws are designed to ensure the survival and sustainable use of a threatened natural resource, rather than enhance the production of an agricultural commodity or address the needs of growers. By developing a "Grower Certification" program in Ohio we can help define the wild-simulated ginseng sector and protect market access for growers. Ohio is currently one of the top 6 ginseng producing States, and has an estimated 350-

500 wild-simulated ginseng growers. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Office of Scientific Authority, who monitors ginseng harvests and exports to ensure sustainability, suggested in the 2009-2010 Ginseng Findings Report that states develop mechanisms to quantify wild-simulated production, specifically mentioning "Grower Certification" as a desirable option.

### Need Description

Without a mechanism in place to distinguish the wild-simulated sector as a separate entity, growers who are intentionally producing ginseng crops are exposed to potential changes to wild ginseng laws that could impact their ability to harvest and market their crop. Changes that have

recently been discussed by regulators include shortening the harvest season, increasing age requirements for harvestable roots, creating size requirements for harvestable roots, or a potential ban on the harvest and sale of roots if adverse impacts to wild populations are identified.

Grower certification could also help address issues that are impacting growers, such as crop damage from natural disasters, animal predation, or human theft. Because of the high value of ginseng roots many growers have experienced ginseng theft or, "poaching," from their property with minimal legal recourse. Depending on market factors, high quality wild or wild-simulated ginseng root is valued at \$400-\$1,000 per dried pound, representing a significant economic loss to producers if they are poached.

By developing a program that recognizes ginseng growers as agricultural producers it could grant them more protection under the law. Without granting the protections normally afforded to agricultural producers, we may be creating disincentives for growers to expand production of a unique commodity that generates more than \$2 million annually for Ohio's rural communities and economies.

### Solutions and Recommendations

- Encourage the Ohio Division of Wildlife to work with stakeholder groups in Ohio to develop a "Grower Certification Program" for **wild-simulated** ginseng growers.



Freshly Harvested Wild-Simulated Ginseng Roots;  
Photo by Chip Carroll

- Encourage the Ohio Division of Wildlife to develop a licensing program for **wild** ginseng harvesters that will strengthen wild ginseng management and enforcement in Ohio.

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