



HERBAL MEDICINE

Domestic Production of Chinese Herbs

Jean Giblette

Since our Web site, LocalHerbs.org was announced in late 2007 at the Pacific Symposium, we have tracked steady sales of domestically and ecologically grown Chinese medicinal herbs shipped directly from farms to AOM practitioners. Peggy Schafer and I set up the Web site on behalf of the loosely-organized network of American production growers of Chinese herbs. Transactions tend to be seasonal, taking place mostly in late fall as the harvests come in, and continuing into the winter.

Sales of 38 different kinds of herbs have been logged since we started. The top seller in terms of weight is *dan shen* (*Salvia miltiorrhiza*), and the top in terms of price is *xi yang shen* (*Panax quinquefolius*). Volumes per herb have been small, but our customers report deep satisfaction with the products and tend to do repeat business. People are experimenting with tinctures and also combining domestic and imported products. Most of our customers practice in California.

The Internet portal for herbs was pioneered by the [Sonoma County Herb Exchange](#) (SCHE), based in Sebastopol, Calif. Thanks to the mild climate, Bay Area herbal practitioners can pick up fresh produce from the Exchange, much like [community-supported agriculture](#) (CSA).



We decided to go national with the Chinese herbs to help stimulate production in other parts of the country. The development of domestic production is a long-term process and something of a chicken-and-egg problem. Growers will not plant until they're sure of a market, yet the market is slow to respond without direct evidence of quality and medicinal equivalency. Growers are interested, but an organized program is needed to get plants in the ground.

Despite this hesitancy, agricultural and economic development groups around the country are

looking into our enterprise. The questions revolve around strategy, economic as well as agronomic. Can we get one farm to grow certified organic *jie geng*? Yes, and we've done that. However, some of the other herbs to make *Yin Qiao San*, for example, are not that easy to grow.

Thanks to the efforts of one of our affiliated land-grant scientists, Charles A. Martin at New Mexico State University (NMSU), the university conducted two Asian Medicinal Herb Production and Marketing workshops this past year, targeted to specialty crop growers in the Southwest. Peggy Schafer and I provided content and served as teachers. About 50 people completed the programs. NMSU put the training program online at <http://aces.nmsu.edu/medicinalherbs>.

The project was funded by the [USDA Risk Management Education agency](#) (Western region), highly appropriate given farmers' needs to approach Chinese herb production with good analysis and planning. It's one thing to grow experimentally, for conservation or to propagate the species, and another thing entirely to grow for production. That's one reason growers must collaborate on a national scale for several years at the beginning of this enterprise to evaluate results and learn which regions produce the best medicinals for any given species. We are seeking more funding to adapt the NMSU program for the Northwest, Southeast and Northeast regions.

Farmers need each other, plus help from nonprofit organizations, governments and land-grant university scientists, as well as five to 15 years of plant time, to grow all the herbs for formulas. However, more than that, we need the participation of the AOM profession. You are the authorities in America on AOM philosophy. Without your leadership, our work could be appropriated and added to the plethora of magic bullets clogging the shelves of health food stores. So the question is, how can you help?

Get your hands dirty. We hear from many AOM students and practitioners who want to grow herbs. Both Peggy and I are running internship and lecture programs, as is colleague Joe Hollis in North Carolina. Z'ev Rosenberg at Pacific College of Oriental Medicine and Robert Newman at Emperor's College are actively involved in teaching about plants.

Place an order. Even if you have to wait for delivery, your order is logged, aggregated and shown to potential funders to demonstrate a market for the herbs.

Contribute money or refer us to potential funders. At present, we do not charge a brokerage fee. All the money goes to growers and for shipping. We see this first stage as a public service designed to demonstrate the potential for domestic herb production and to attract broad participation. Your tax-deductible donation to the new nonprofit High Falls Foundation, Inc., supports an educational, research and conservation mission consistent with the purpose of LocalHerbs.

Cooperate to change the world. If we are to ensure access to our herbs over the long term, a critical mass of people must adopt a common vision. We must be for a restorative economy, and we are the ones who must design and build it. The details of this new paradigm will become increasingly clear in our minds as we follow our hearts, then cooperate with colleagues who share our devotion.

Right now, the obstacles may seem insurmountable. Yes, our society is in a chaotic period, but the new forms that emerge from these trials are already taking shape. This progress report is offered in hopes that you will comprehend the scope of the work to be done, take courage and decide where you fit in.

See the [March 2008 issue of *Acupuncture Today*](#) for more background on LocalHerbs.

