

Scientists are paving the way for more sustainable Danish berry production

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Sour cherries are just one of the types of berries that scientists at Aarhus University are collaborating with the industry to increase the sustainability of. Stock photo

The production of Danish berries for processing is under pressure due to fierce competition from abroad. In recent years the price achieved for production berries in Denmark has been less than the actual production costs. Using the berries for wine, vinegar and juice instead could be one way of solving the problem.

The Danish berry production can compete with foreign berry productions by being different from its competitors. This can be done by concentrating on quality, sustainability and specialist products.

Scientists from Aarhus University are leading a project that uses a number of initiatives to significantly expand the Danish production of berries and improve its sustainability. The scientists expect, among other things, that the results of the project can increase the area growing organic blackcurrants in Denmark from 18 ha to 450 ha and sour cherries from 3 ha to 250 ha.

"If we are to continue the production of Danish berries for processing, the industry needs to differentiate itself from its competitors," says Science Team Leader Karen Koefoed Petersen from the Department of Food Science, Aarhus University. She leads the project that aims to optimise the sustainability of the production of Danish berries for processing and to develop high-value products. This is to be achieved by more rational management practices and by increasing the added value of the final product.

Organic production

The project works with berry production from different angles - both in the field and at the processing stage.

One of the measures that can be used to give the Danish commercial berry production a competitive edge is by converting the production to

organic farming methods. In this way, the Danish berry growers can ensure that products are free from pesticides and other undesirable chemicals.

An organic production is, however, often characterised by producing less than a conventional production. The project will address this problem by developing new and optimised fertilisation and weed control regimes in organic blackcurrant crops.

To prevent fungal diseases in organic sour cherries and to ensure a high yield, the project will develop new environmentally friendly cropping and control methods. The project will also develop management systems in the sour cherry production that ensure that more cost-effective and low-impact harvesters are used.

Selecting the right varieties is important for a number of reasons. In the field, important factors are particularly the yield, disease resistance and suitability for the harvesting methods used.

The best varieties and species

Another important aspect is how well suited the berries are for a particular end product. One variety may lend itself well to wine production, while another is perfect for vinegar.

"Both conventional and organic growers can achieve added value for their berries by cultivating varieties that have specific high-value properties," says Karen Koefoed Petersen and explains that the project will work out the links between specific properties of selected berry varieties and their value in relation to the processing for high-value products.

Sour cherries and blackcurrants are not the only types of berry included

in the project. The project will in fact look at a wide range of opportunities for introducing new species into the Danish berry production.

"Introduction of new berry species for which there is less international competition can strengthen the Danish berry production," says Karen Koefoed Petersen.

The [project](#) will also develop processes and prototypes of high-value products of blackcurrants and sour cherries, which can sharpen the competitive edge for Danish berry growers and industry. This is where cherry wine made on sour cherries, fruit wine vinegars and gourmet juices - or other novel [products](#) - enter the picture.

Provided by Aarhus University

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