



ORGANIC BERRY FARM EARNS IOWA FARM BUREAU RENEW RURAL IOWA AWARD

WEST DES MOINES, IOWA – Sept. 14, 2012 – Sawmill Hollow, the country's first aronia berry farm located in Missouri Valley, is this month's Iowa Farm Bureau Renew Rural Iowa entrepreneur award winner.

The organic berry operation is a unique family farm run by Vaughn and Cindy Pittz and their son, Andrew. In 1997, the Pittzes planted 207 aronia berry plants and have since expanded the farm to 26 acres and more than 13,000 plants. The berries, also known as black chokeberries, can be made into a variety of products, including syrup, sauce, powders and wine.

After looking into a number of value-added ideas, ranging from Christmas trees to pumpkin patches, the family found aronia berries offered the best potential. "My duty, and every multi-generational farm needs this, is to add something to what came before you," said Andrew about capitalizing on his dad's farm knowledge and developing a new product for the area and the state. "This is a high-value, niche product that we can track from field to its final form. We wanted to put out a national product, from the heartland, that can tell the story of where it came from."

The business is a benefit to Iowa's ag industry and to the Missouri Valley economy with its annual festival. Sawmill Hollow's fifth annual North American Aronia Festival is this weekend, Sept. 15-16, featuring children's activities, wine tasting, recipe contest, farming and gardening workshops and more. (For a full schedule, go to <http://sawmillhollow.com/>.)

"This farm really shows the diversity of what can be grown on the hills here, outside of corn and soybeans," said Lynn Stamp, Harrison County Farm Bureau president. "And their festival supports the local economy and establishes our area as a tourist destination."

Renew Rural Iowa (RRI) is an Iowa Farm Bureau Federation initiative supporting new and existing businesses through education, mentoring and financial resources. To learn more, visit www.renewruraliowa.com.

