

Foraging for development: An analysis of the Swedish wild berry innovation system

Umea Berry Symposia – Abstract

Authors: Paul Plummer, Johnn Andersson (RISE Research Institutes of Sweden), Thomas Lennerfors (Uppsala University)

Driven by strategic objectives such as regional development, increased domestic value added, improved labour conditions and reduced environmental impacts, a range of actors are pursuing innovation related to the Swedish wild berry value chain. The aim of our paper is to analyse the dynamics and directionality of Swedish wild berry innovation and draw implications for ongoing efforts to develop the Swedish wild berry value chain. Our study is based on 18 semi-structured interviews, multiple informal conversations, participant observations and a range of secondary sources. We use an analytical framework based on the agricultural innovation systems approach and pay specific attention to ecology, reflexivity and directionality.

Our analysis suggests that the Swedish wild berry innovation system is fragmented as a result of partly conflicting objectives among actors in the innovation system. We argue that there is a need for broader governance networks to navigate trade-offs and enable the commercialization of new solutions. Our findings suggest that successful innovation likely hinges on institutional change, particularly when it comes to efforts to improve labour conditions for migrant workers. Our study contributes empirically to research on non-timber forest product value chains and offers insights for actors pursuing innovation related to Swedish wild berries. We also contribute to theoretical development in the agricultural innovation systems literature by incorporating attention to ecology, reflexivity and directionality.