Link 5. Echinacea angustifolia Socio-Economics

(Compiled by Robyn Klein)

Photo credit: *N.A. Flanagan Store* [image]. Catalog No. 947-069. The Montana Historical Society Research Center, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

The demand for purple coneflower has pushed a few states into passing laws to protect wild *Echinacea*. Two species are federally protected. *Echinacea laevigata* and *E. tennesseensis. Echinacea laevigata* is only found in a few counties of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. *Echinacea tennesseensis* is found only in three counties in Tennessee.

The cost of *Echinacea* changes depending on the market and demand.

In 1905, the root sold for $1.00 per pound.

During the "*Echinacea* gold rush" on the Fort Peck Reservation (1995-1998), diggers were first paid $3.50 per pound of fresh root. This shifted to $6.50 to $8.00 a pound of fresh root. Fierce competition between local buyers increased the prices paid to diggers. Read more about this in an article written about a tribal elder at Fort Peck, Curley Youpee, "*Echinacea gold rush: Curley Youpee fights to preserve an ancient legacy"* by Kimberly Lord Stewart. Your teacher or librarian can help you access this online document found through your public library: *http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/9131860/echinacea-gold-rush*

The market for *Echinacea* root rose and fell as the market became flooded. Harvesting would slow or end when the price became too low for the harvesters or the buyers did not need more roots.

Harvesters reported making $20-$200 per day digging *Echinacea* roots, depending on how many hours and ability to find plants.

People would take time off work to dig *Echinacea* because it paid better than their jobs. Often, cost of gas and wear and tear on vehicles was not taken into account. Buyers would place ads in the local newspapers or post advertising placards along the road.

Buyers thought that most harvesters were selling five to twenty pounds of fresh root a day; estimated at $32 to $145. The more experienced harvesters were digging up to 50 pounds of *Echinacea* root per day. One company bought 545 kg of root per day and paid out over $1.1 million to *Echinacea* harvesters in 1998.

The price paid to professional wildcrafters (harvesters) off the reservation was in the range of $30-50 per pound of fresh root. The difference was that on the reservation there were intermediate buyers who took a cut, instead of harvesters selling direct to the end buyers, as professional wildcrafters did.

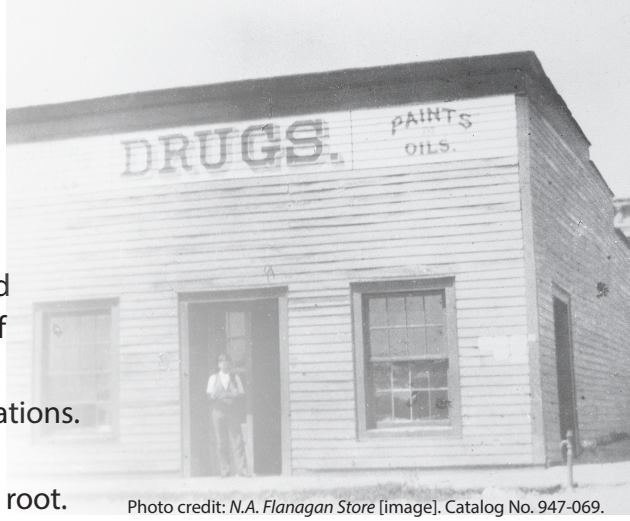


Photo credit: *N.A. Flanagan Store* [image]. Catalog No. 947-069. The Montana Historical Society Research Center, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

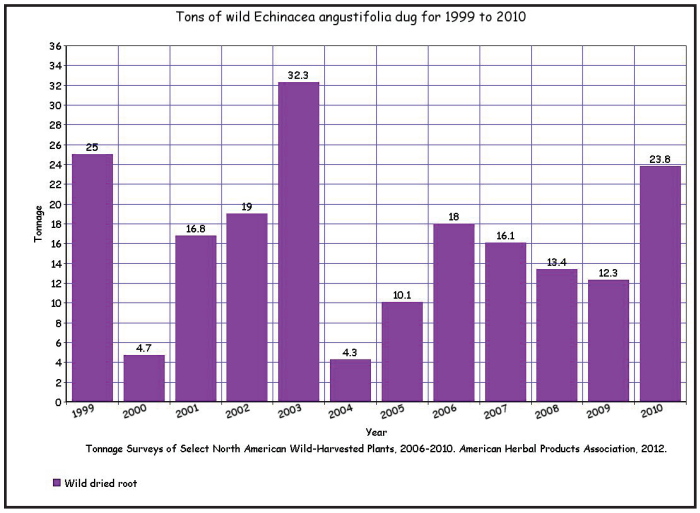
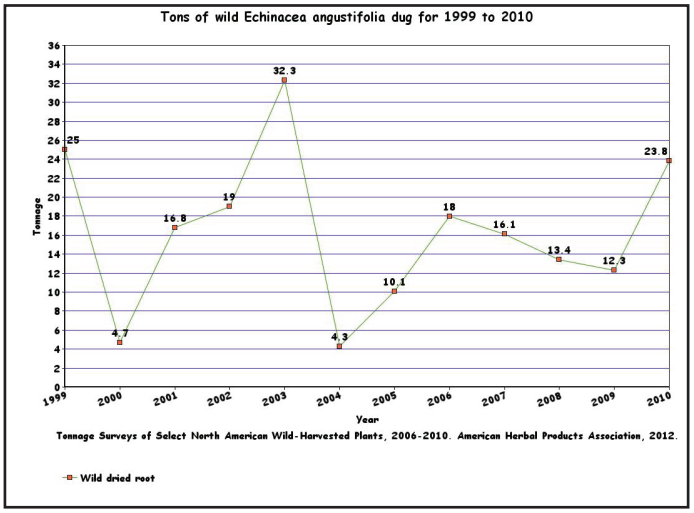
Echinacea angustifolia seed was also collected for sale to buyers. Seventeen to twenty pounds of seed heads from 3-5 plants would equal one pound of seed, worth $6.50-8.00 a pound. One order of 300 pounds of seed required around 1500 plants to be cropped of their heads, leaving less native seed abundance for wild populations.

During the digging rush, there were contests held for the biggest root. Diggers would ignore the smaller plants and try to get the largest, heaviest plants. This behavior eliminated the oldest *Echinacea* plants from the wild plant populations—probably up to 40 year-old plants. One winner had dug a 96.5 cm-long (37.9 inches) *Echinacea* root.

Some people made money by charging diggers $20/person to dig on their private property.

During this "purple gold rush" there were complaints of trespassers on private land and damage to land such as leaving behind holes and trash.

Poachers were caught with 83 pounds of fresh roots by Custer National Forest Service officers in 1998.

Under Montana law it is a crime to dig any plant in large amounts without permission of the landowner.

Digging *Echinacea* without permission on private land could lead to a $10,000 fine.