

Abstract

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From Research to Market: The A+ Berry Commercialization Journey

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University research generates new knowledge and technologies, but translating an innovation from the laboratory into a product that creates real-world impact is a very different challenge. This presentation shares the journey of A+ Berry, a university research-based startup built around an underutilized fruit crop, and the lessons learned in moving research toward commercialization.

The journey began with a practical challenge from aronia berry growers. Aronia is rich in polyphenols, but its strong astringency limits consumer acceptance and market development. Research aimed at addressing this challenge led to the development of processing technology to improve the sensory quality of aronia products while maintaining their nutritional value. What started as a research question eventually progressed to intellectual property, customer discovery, product development, and the creation of A+ Berry.

However, developing a technology was only the first step. Moving from the laboratory to the marketplace required navigating challenges that are not typically part of academic research, including product formulation, manufacturing, scale-up, food safety, packaging, funding, distribution, marketing, consumer education, and balancing academic and entrepreneurial responsibilities. Support from university resources, commercialization programs, government funding, industry partners, growers, retailers, and customers played an important role throughout this process. Today, A+ Berry has moved beyond its initial product and continues to expand its product portfolio, technologies, and markets, with the long-term goal of building a comprehensive platform around aronia berry.

Using the A+ Berry story as a case study, this presentation will discuss both successes and challenges encountered along the commercialization pathway and share practical lessons for researchers interested in translating food engineering innovations into marketable products. The experience demonstrates that commercialization is not simply about developing a technology or obtaining a patent; it requires understanding customers, building partnerships, adapting to unexpected challenges, and creating an ecosystem that can transform research discoveries into sustainable real-world impact.