SeedChange
Formerly USC Canada

Jottings

2023



Together, we changed the way the world sees farmers.

Dr. Melaku Worede (1936–2023), visionary scientist and advocate for farmers' rights.

*"I will never forget the day in 1987 when someone knocked on the door of our office at 56 Sparks St. When we opened the door, a man peered in and said, '**My people are eating their seeds. I want to work with you.**' This man was Dr. Melaku Worede and what followed changed the course of our work and his country's history." –Marie Dulude, SeedChange staff*

The birth of the Seeds of Survival (SoS) program

Award-winning program has been changing lives for decades

In the mid-1980's, back-to-back years of civil war and record low rainfall in Ethiopia triggered one of the world's most haunting famines. Hundreds of thousands of people perished and millions were left destitute.

With their land turned to dust, farming families were either forced to eat seeds for next year's harvest or store them away and try to avoid the impossible temptation. **Alongside this unfolding human tragedy was a global agricultural tragedy.** Ethiopia is a centre of origin for many of humanity's major food crops, including staples like barley, sorghum, millet, and wheat. This famine was different. The genetic resources within thousands of seed varieties were at risk of disappearing forever.

One of the observers of this unfolding chaos was Dr. Melaku Worede, a plant geneticist and Director of Ethiopia's National Gene Bank in Ethiopia.

Alongside Pat Mooney, a Canadian well known for his work on seed diversity, they devised a



plan: **rescue as many diverse farmer seeds as possible, multiply them and give them back to the farmers, thus preserving the country's agricultural biodiversity**. They approached former Executive Director John Martin, and thus was born the organization's now global Seeds of Survival (SoS) program.

The Seeds of Survival approach was clear from the start. As Dr. Melaku put it at the time: **"The priority is to start with diversity in the field. Farmers have been the custodians of biodiversity, and they need support. It is high time there was much more funding for this**



work. We lose everything if we lose diversity in the field."

The hard work paid off. Scientists and farmers worked together to find and conserve local seed varieties and to increase their productivity. Soon after, farmers built and managed community seed banks. These banks provided a place for farmers to store samples of their best seeds and facilitated the reintroduction and restoration of the previously lost diversity.

For three decades now, with the generous and ongoing support of donors, SeedChange has managed Seeds of Survival (SoS)—an award-winning program that has strengthened farmers' seed systems around the world, particularly in the centres of crop origin and diversity. Since those early days, the SoS concept and model has spread and led to a worldwide effort to restore the crucial foundations of agriculture—by putting farmers and their seeds first.

It is hard to overstate how important this work was at the time, or how profound an impact it had on the future direction of SeedChange. **Dr. Melaku's approach to placing farmers first lives on in the work you support today. Thank you for continuing to seed change with us.**

Ethiopia, a country of diverse landscapes, is a world centre of origin and diversity for many of our food crops. It was, fittingly, the birthplace of our global Seeds of Survival program.



Honouring a visionary scientist and advocate for farmers' rights



This summer, we lost an important member of our SeedChange community, Dr. Melaku Worede.

Dr. Melaku was an Ethiopian plant geneticist who recognised the vital importance of on-farm diversity as a strategy to increase and conserve biodiversity. As the director of Ethiopia's national genebank, he devoted his life to securing Ethiopia's diverse heritage of traditional crops.

Under his guidance, farmers' traditional practices and knowledge were incorporated into into agrobiodiversity programming. He helped to reintroduce lost seed varieties and support farmers to conserve and grow out their seeds, an effort that helped Ethiopia recover from the disastrous drought and famine of 1984.

Among his many accolades, in 1989 he co-founded our award winning Seeds of Survival (SoS) program and received the Right Livelihood Award for his pioneering work conserving Ethiopia's plant diversity. He became the inaugural Chair of the African Committee for Plant and Genetic Resources and was pivotal in establishing the African Biodiversity Network. Thanks in large part to him, the protection of traditional knowledge and recognition of Farmers' Rights were formally enshrined in the FAO's International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

He achieved remarkable success in the academic world, publishing extensively and generously sharing his knowledge with others. He travelled around the world on training missions to farm communities, assisting with the launching of new farmer seed programs.

Colleagues and friends have praised Dr. Melaku's dedication to changing global perceptions of farmers and their contributions to biodiversity. He is remembered for his integrity, intellect, generosity and humility. Ethiopia is a model for biodiversity conservation thanks to his pioneering achievements.

On behalf of everyone in the SeedChange community, we thank Dr. Melaku for his profound contributions as a colleague and friend over a remarkable lifetime.



Farmer and community leader, Victoria Aguirre, in front of one of the first solar coffee dryers built with your support, in Campanario II, Honduras

BETTER COFFEE, BETTER PRICE, THANKS TO YOU

If you drink coffee, odds are you've had coffee from Honduras, Central America's top coffee exporter.

Three years ago, SeedChange partnered with Bridgehead, an Ottawa-based fair trade coffee company, to raise funds to build solar dryers for several communities in Honduras, with the support of our partner FIPAH. The pandemic delayed the construction of the final dryer but this year Plan de Mangos, Honduras became the latest community to be able to produce and sell excellent coffee, thanks to you!

Solar coffee dryers can make the difference between a coffee receiving an average rating and a very high-quality rating. **The difference for communities can be profound. Higher quality coffee means a higher price, which translates into better opportunities for families and the community in the future.**

By supporting simple yet effective investments like these communal solar coffee dryers, you've helped one more farming community in Honduras.

Thank you!

WITH YOUR HELP, EAST AFRICAN FARMERS ARE TAKING STOCK OF THEIR SEED FUTURE

Until all members of a farming community sit down and assess the state of their seeds, it is difficult to know which, if any, might need saving. With your support, SeedChange has been engaging farming communities in Tanzania, Kenya, and Ethiopia to determine just that.

The tool for this, a Seed Security Assessment, is the culmination of eight years of development by SeedChange teams and partners in more than 14 countries around the world.

In this process, farmers and community leaders gather together and begin a discussion about the foods they grow and eat. They use seeds placed on a large sheet of paper in order to visually classify which crops are the most important, based on a set of criteria: is the crop adaptable, is it good for storage, is it pest-resistant, is it nutritionally-valuable, and does it have cultural significance?

With this method, members of the farming community decide, together, which crops are the most valuable to them, and therefore should be grown for seed production to ensure their future use.

Your generosity allowed us to engage farmers in Seed Security Assessments in Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia this year, ensuring that the seeds of their most important vegetables and fruits will not disappear from their diets or culture.

This single piece of paper may not look like much, but it holds the food future of an entire community.





Photo: UBC Farm

Keep Calm and Carrot On

With your help, farmers are developing a new favourite carrot

Over the past five years, farmers in our Canadian program have been testing different carrot varieties on their farms and evaluating their favourites. **But what happens when you discover that your favourite carrot is a hybrid that you can't save the seed from?**

Hybrid seeds can produce crops with valuable traits, but their seeds can't reliably be saved and planted again. They can also put farmers at risk since hybrid varieties owned by a single company can be dropped without warning, leaving growers in the lurch.

Farmers in BC, therefore, sought to create an open-pollinated, orange storage carrot, one that could perform as well as the hybrids, but could be more easily reproduced and maintained by the farmers themselves.

With your support, and in collaboration with researchers from the University of British Columbia, farmers engaged in the Canadian Organic Vegetable Improvement (CANOVI) project. **The program aims to test and develop vegetable varieties that thrive in our unique Canadian landscapes.**

Like all seed work, this is slow work: carrot varieties take years to develop and present different agronomic and economic challenges every year. **Thanks to your support, farmers are well on the way to building a public breeding program that works to keep seeds in public hands.**



Photo: Chris Thoreau

Selecting carrot roots for the project

"As a smaller scale, locally-embedded organic farm, our definition of what makes a great carrot is different from what works for the multinational industrial farm. This participatory carrot breeding project is helping develop a carrot that reflects the needs and values of growers like us."
–John Pattison of Bright Farm on Salt Spring Island, B.C.

The SeedChange family celebrates the lives and legacies of former colleagues and friends



John Martin, Melaku Worede and Pat Mooney. The 3 'M's and founders of the Seeds of Survival program.

John Martin (1928–2023), former Executive Director

John Martin left his mark on SeedChange (formerly USC Canada) where he served as Executive Director from 1985-1999. His life's work in International Development began in India. He worked side-by-side with the people of the villages in the Assam hills where he built schools, medical dispensaries and chapels.

He returned to Canada after 12 years abroad, and continued his work, first with CIDA and later as Executive Director of USC Canada, where he co-founded the pioneering Seeds of Survival (SoS) program.

John was ahead of his time in championing issues including sustainability, environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, farmers' rights, and women's rights through the grassroots programs he initiated and supported. He believed in accepting and engaging with people of all cultures and walks of life, without judgment, and supporting individuals and communities to achieve and become masters of their own goals.

John is remembered by those who worked with him as kind, humble, and deeply invested in helping people. SeedChange is grateful for the profound role that John played in the history of our organization and in the many lives he influenced along the way.

The SeedChange family celebrates the lives and legacies of former colleagues and friends



Mark Austin (1959–2023), former Board Member

It is with deep sadness that we share the news of the passing of a cherished member of SeedChange's family, Mark Austin.

Mark was a member of the SeedChange Board from 2006 to 2014, Chair from 2010 to 2014, and Chair of the Foundation Board from 2014 to 2019. Throughout his years of dedicated service, he played a significant role in shaping the organization's vision.

Mark worked tirelessly for others and towards a fair and just world for all. He touched the lives of countless individuals around the world through his many pursuits from community development to farming. He had a particular affection for Mali, a country he had visited and whose music and people he grew to love and support.

Anyone lucky enough to attend a board meeting with Mark knew that, in between the business of the day (and sometimes right in the middle of it), there were bound to be laughs, shenanigans and pranks at play. His quick wit, sense of humour, and contagious laughter brought joy and light to those around him.

We are eternally grateful for Mark's impact, which continues to resonate and drive our work forward in West Africa and beyond.



"Jottings" is the name our founder, Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova, gave to the stories she captured in her leather-bound notebook while visiting programs around the world. Sharing these jottings with supporters has been a tradition since 1945.

Become a monthly donor, today

Farming is hard work.
Let farmers know they can count on you.

Join our powerful community of monthly givers and deepen your impact. Farming requires investment year-round. When you give monthly, you provide consistent support that makes a big difference to the lives of farmers.

Giving monthly is also easy. Your donations will be deducted as automatic payments on the 15th of every month and we're always an email or phone call away if you want to make any changes.

Contact SeedChange today at **1-800-565-6872 ext. 1** or by emailing **fundraising@weseedchange.org**.

Marcial Siacara and Maria Lorenzo weed their hillside farm in Cocaphaya, Bolivia. Your past support helped them access an irrigation system. Now they can sell their surplus vegetables to generate an income for their families.



More than **75 years** of global impact!

Thank you for making this life-changing work happen.

Donate online. It's easy, fast, safe, and secure:
weseedchange.org/donate

Call our toll-free number:
1-800-565-6872 and **press 1**

Please mail your cheque to SeedChange:
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SeedChange

We are a registered Canadian charity:
11927-6129-RR-0001

SeedChange was founded by Dr. Lotta Hitschmanova, in 1945, as the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada (USC Canada).

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