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SeedChange

NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS LOCALLY-GROWN SEED DIVERSITY IN CANADA

OTTAWA, CANADA - May 17, 2024 - The non-profit organization, SeedChange, has published a new report titled “Building Climate-Resilient Seed Systems in Canada” that highlights local organic seeds as key to food and seed security, and climate-resilient agriculture.

The majority of vegetable seed sold in Canada is imported from the United States, Europe, and Asia, where it is bred and/or grown before being offered to Canadian seed companies for resale, according to the report. This model of importing and re-selling seed is useful for farmers looking for high volumes of competitively priced seed, but it also creates dependence on a global supply chain, which not only contributes to climate change through greenhouse gas emissions, but is also highly vulnerable to disruption. “A natural disaster, crop failure, or border closure anywhere in the world might affect seed availability for vegetable varieties that are important in Canada,” says Aabir Dey, SeedChange’s Canadian Program Director.

SeedChange's report highlights the farmers and seed growers in Canada who are working to develop local alternatives to this system.

For the last three years, SeedChange organized 24 “seed demonstration gardens” across Canada[1] , including three sites in the Maritimes, to showcase and evaluate local varieties of vegetables and grains grown on organic and ecological farms. Included in the report are profiles of unique vegetable varieties that have been developed and regionally adapted by farmers and seed growers in Canada.

“I am so proud to announce the release of this report,” says Dey. “Organic and ecological farmers across Canada are creating more resilient seed systems by preserving heritage varieties, producing good quality local seed, and creating seed diversity on their farms through plant breeding. These regional seed varieties are tools for growers to become more seed secure, and better adapt to the impacts of climate change.”

One such variety is the Latah tomato, bred in Idaho and brought to Canada by Greg Wingate of Mapple Farm in New Brunswick. For 20 years, Greg has been selecting Latah

[1] This project was funded in part by the Government of Canada through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s (AAFC) Canadian Agricultural Strategic Priorities Program (CASPP).

for earliness, resulting in a tomato plant that can be transplanted or directly sown, and which yields ripened tomatoes from July onward. This is a coup for farmers and gardeners who have short growing seasons. “I was getting requests from Yellowknife and Labrador and really extreme places, saying, ‘*Wow*, I never knew I could grow a ripe tomato before,’” notes Greg. “And that’s what I was after: to offer something that was extremely early, that was flavourful, and very productive.”[2] Latah highlights the role that local seed stewards play in selecting, adapting, and popularizing great varieties.

Gardeners and farmers who use organic and ecological practices need a diversity of regionally-produced seeds that are well adapted to those conditions. Regional seed varieties help fill a critical gap in the sustainable agriculture sector, concludes the report.

To read the full report, please visit weseedchange.org/resilient-seed. For a listing of companies offering regional seed, please visit weseedchange.org/local-seed.

About the Project: The seed demonstration gardens are part of the *Growth Opportunities for Canadian-Grown Organic and Climate-Resilient Seed in Canada* project. This project was funded in part by the Government of Canada through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s (AAFC) Canadian Agricultural Strategic Priorities Program (CASPP).

Learn more about SeedChange (formerly USC Canada) at weseedchange.org and SeedChange’s Canadian program, The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, at seedsecurity.ca.

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[2] From SeedHeads Podcast: seedsecurity.ca/en/resources/seedheads-podcast. Audio clip available here.