

Seed Sovereignty is Food Sovereignty:

Jane Rabinowicz, Program Director of the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Food Security:

Executive Summary:

Jane Rabinowicz is the program director for the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security. This initiative operates alongside USC Canada and has several partner organizations, including Seeds of Diversity Canada and ACORN. The initiative has targeted seeds because of their importance in terms of their nutritional value, ecological value, and the fact that secure seeds should lead to a secure food supply. Many trends, realities and concerns have been identified, which deal with the issues surrounding seeds and the conflicting interests of industry and grower. The ecological seed movement in Canada today is one poised by a conservation and community building effort by many self-organizers. Since there are already various self-organized seed saver networks that exist, the Bauta Initiative aims to work with existing organizations to strengthen regional networks. The initiative is in its preliminary stages, but so far the program has been announced, employment positions for regional coordinators have been posted, a survey for farmers has been developed, and funds are actively available for seed events.

Detailed Notes:

The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security is a project funded by USC Canada, with many partner organizations, including Seeds of Diversity and ACORN. USC Canada was founded in 1945 and it is one of Canada's longest established NGOs. USC has done a great deal of work to encourage sustainable development throughout the world, but the Bauta Initiative is USC's first project based in Canada. Jane is the program director for the initiative.

1. Why Seed?

Seeds are so important because they equal food; nutrition begins with seeds. As stated by Agriculture Canada, "an estimated nine out of every ten bites of food available in the world today begin with the planting of seeds."

There has recently been an illusion of abundance of seed varieties in seed catalogues, whereas in reality the varieties are actually being dropped from catalogues. As such, saving seed today means securing the food supply for tomorrow.

While seeds equal food in one sense, they are also unique to food and they are separate entities. As Jane stated, if you control the seed you control the food and if you control the food you control the people. Despite this consistency in the sentiment of control, there are differences amongst seeds. For example, growing requirements are different and the marketplace is different. Another important note is that seed is inherently political.

Getting back to the idea of nutrition, growing seed helps support ecological farmers. Seed production can be part of a healthy farm ecosystem and healthy farm business (i.e., attracting pollinators, etc.).

2. Realities, Trends and Concerns

There is a deeply embedded relationship between seed security and food security. Some of these include:

- Productivity of regional crops
- Resilience of the crops
- Decentralized control
- Wide germplasm
- Biodiversity
- Sustainable economies

There are many challenges that ecological seed growers currently face, such as:

- Infrastructure
- Distribution capacity
- Skills and knowledge
- Finances and time for breeding
- Academic support
- Legislation (this is a challenge on the field crop side)
- Management of seed crop security
- Isolation from other growers and breeders
- Inspiration for new growers

3. Ecological Seed Movement in Canada Today

There has been an effort to pursue seed conservation by many groups:

- Seeds of Diversity Canada
- Plant Gene Resources of Canada (PGRC)
 - o This is the largest bank, located in Saskatoon
 - o They have been having trouble renewing their collection at the same rate at which the seeds expire
- Local seed savers

Ecological seed production in Canada has been a movement of self-organizers.

Here are a few examples of these self-organizers:

- Eastern Canada Organic Seed Growers Network (ECOSGN)
- BC Seeds (officially a project of Farm Folk City Folk)
- Saugeen River CSA (this is a partnership between backyard gardeners and organic growers; as far as Jane understands, there is no money exchange in this system)
- Organic Alberta
- Coop Agrobio de Québec

It is recommended that seed savers collaborate with industry and government allies to help advance their work.

4. Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security

The goal of the Bauta Initiative is to facilitate a seed system that serves as a foundation for food security, climate resilience and community well being. The first objective for the initiative is to strengthen regional networks and to build a national network. The second objective is to conserve, expand, and commercialize high quality, regionally adapted, ecologically grown, Canadian seed.

2012 PEI ACORN Conference The Rodd Charlottetown – November 22-24th

The working model that is being used to ensure that these objectives are reached is focused on building existing momentum from groups like ACORN and ECOSGN, as well as to partner with existing organizations. Existing organizations have signed on as partners and they include:

- USC Canada
- Seeds of Diversity Canada
- Farm Folk City Folk
- Organic Alberta
- Everdale Organic Farm and Environmental Learning Centre
- ACORN
- Mrs. Bauta and the W. Garfield Weston Foundation

There are five program streams that are being focused on and if you refer to the image on PowerPoint, the size of the bubble indicates the emphasis that is being put on the stream. The first stream is ensuring that *support is provided for farmers*, such as training, financial support, equipment, and larger investments in co-op initiatives to develop bulk seed capacity. The second stream looks at *applied research*, such as looking at who is breeding what, but most importantly looking at the nutrition, climate and ecological sustainability of the politics surrounding seed saving. The third stream deals with *public access*, specifically the encouragement of more seed libraries. The fourth stream is the *development of a web extension service* since more and more producers are accessing information online. The final stream is *movement building*, which incorporates the hiring of five program coordinators through ACORN. Movement building and supporting farmers are the most important streams.

Hopeful outcomes for the Bauta Initiative include strengthened regional networks, as well as ensuring that there are regional and national organizations that will be able to continue the work. These organizations will be encouraged to integrate the mission, have financial resources, be regionally coordinated and nationally coherent, as well as linked to the broader food movement in Canada.

As of November 24, 2012, the program has been announced, employment positions for regional coordinators have been posted, a survey for farmers has been developed, and funds are actively available for seed events. On an endnote, Jane says, “Good food comes from good seed.”

During the question and discussion period Jane mentioned that from her observations Seedy Saturdays used to emphasize the sale of seeds, but now they put greater emphasis on meeting and having discussions with those that prepared the seeds and packages.