

Training Seed Savers In Plant Characterization and Regeneration

GENEVA, N.Y. — The Plant Genetic Resources Unit (PGRU) of the USDA-ARS at Geneva, New York, hosted a two-day workshop, September 18-19, 2000, for training seed savers in heirloom plant characterization and regeneration.

"The major goals of this workshop were to provide participants from organic farmer and seed-saving non-governmental organizations (NGOs) the skills to describe varieties using the descriptor lists available from the National Plant Germplasm System and elsewhere and to multiply heirloom varieties showing potential in a manner that preserves their identity and provides sufficient high quality seed," said Larry Robertson, USDA vegetable crop curator.

"The workshop aimed to train trainers from the organizations involved so that they could act as mentors in training other members of their organizations in the demonstrated methodologies."

Seed saver enthusiasts are interested in using heirloom varieties in the PGRU seed repository for production on their farms. Workshop organizers provided the links and basic knowledge to access germplasm and characterize it. After selecting the plants they would like to use, the seed savers have the basic skills needed to regenerate them in a manner that preserves their uniqueness.

Through informed laypersons, the PGRU hopes to get more germplasm out of the vault and into farmer fields, providing for on-farm conservation of important and useful heirloom varieties. Heirloom enthusiasts are expected to play an important role in turning PGRU collections into living plants that all can experience and enjoy.

"We provided a pool of en-

thusiastic seed savers with the basic training needed to get started characterizing and regenerating heirlooms in a manner that meets minimal standards," said Robertson.

Even though the participants still have much to learn, he said they made a "good start" in taking a role in preserving our common heritage of the genetic resources treasure maintained in the genebanks. "We have added a strong, enthusiastic group to our pool of stakeholders," he said, "and we hope to strengthen links with them in future activities."

Lectures covered general concepts of descriptors followed by hands-on experience at the experimental farm in characterizing cabbage, onion and tomato accessions. The lectures covered

the minimal descriptor lists used for cabbage, onion and tomato and also gave an introduction to the various types of descriptors used, their format, and the importance of heritability and environmental interaction in characterization and evaluation.

Participants were trained to score for such characters as onion bulb shape, tomato fruit shape and other characters. The minimal descriptor lists for all three crops were covered, scoring demonstrated, and the participants trained to score. Imaging of tomato and onion bulb shapes was demonstrated and discussed at the Wellington Farm, in Geneva. The importance of photographic documentation was demonstrated. Participants also learned from a lecture and demonstration of

computerizing characterization data in a format that is easily exchangeable, plus brief coverage of the on-line Genetic Resources Information Network (GRIN) and how to access it via the Internet.

Lectures also covered important issues in small-scale regeneration of heirlooms including plant breeding systems, plant habits, use of pollinators, and IPM. This was followed by demonstrations at the Wellington

Farm of protocols used in planting varieties for regeneration using cages for pollination, how bee hives are used for pollination, and a demonstration of seed threshing, processing and cleaning equipment used for seed production of tomatoes, Brassica crops and onion. The day ended with coverage of the importance of proper drying, storage, and testing germination and other seed quality traits.



LanChester Pork Council Production Forum & Annual Meeting

Dec. 19th 9:30-2:00

Yoder's Restaurant, New Holland, PA

- 9:30 AM - 10 AM Registration
- 10 AM - 10:30 AM Hatfield Quality Meats: Animal Handling
- 10:30 AM - 11 AM Leidy's: Meat Quality and PSE
- 11 AM - 12 Livestock Environmental Certification: PSU Extension
- 12 - 1 PM Lunch and Annual Meeting
- 1 PM - 2 PM PQA Level III Recertification: PSU Extension



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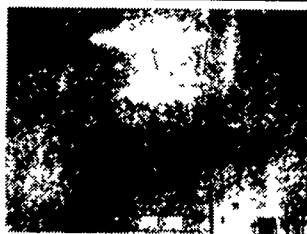
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- Dec. 6 by Pfizer
- Dec. 7 by Fort Dodge
- Dec. 8 by Natural EFX
- Dec. 13 by Intervet & Schering
- Dec. 14 by Fort Dodge

Other company reps will be here at various times to answer questions.

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